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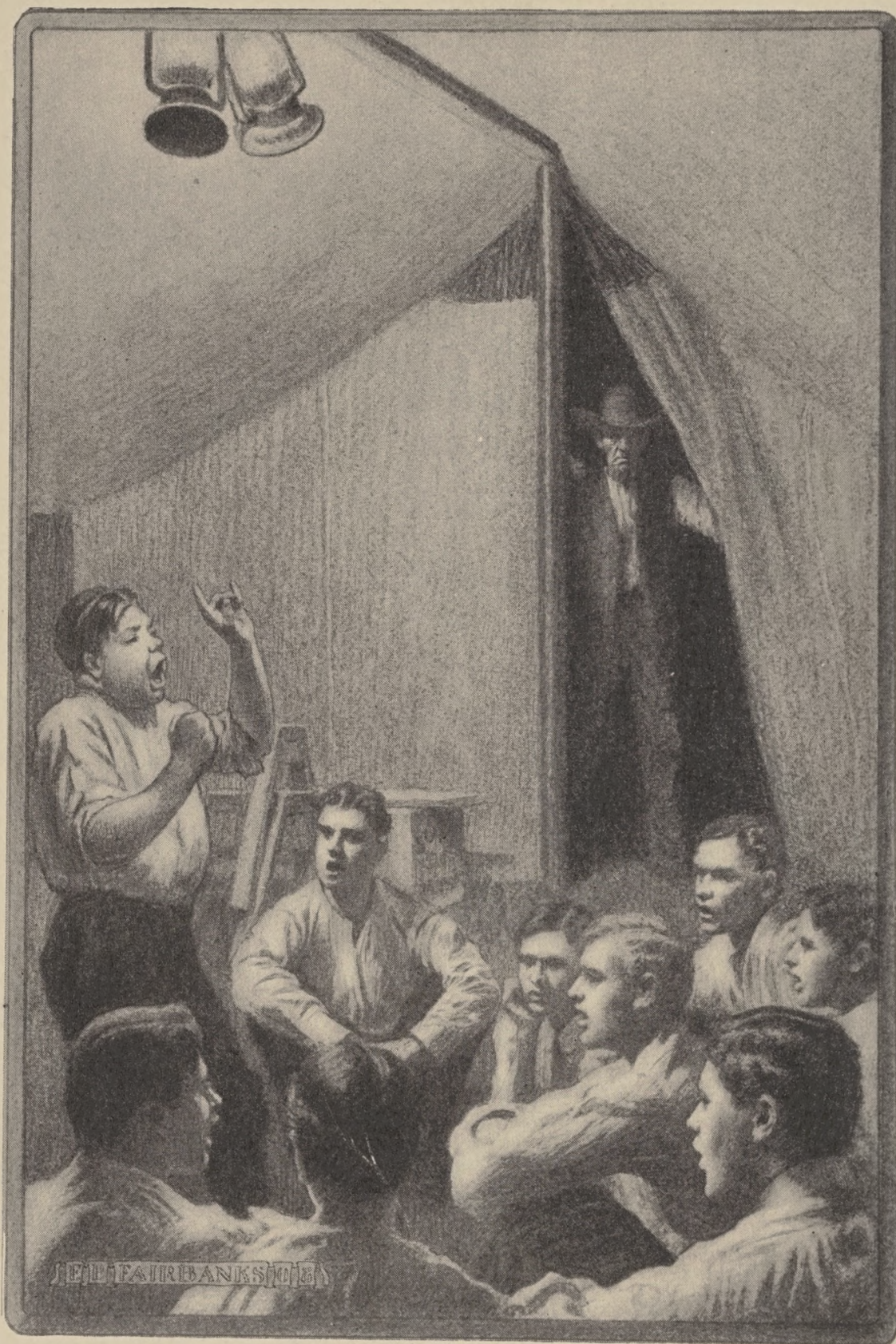
JACK LORIMER'S HOLIDAYS

THE
JACK LORIMER SERIES

—
By WINN STANDISH
—

Each one vol., large 12mo, cloth, illustrated, per volume, \$1.50
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CAPTAIN JACK LORIMER
JACK LORIMER'S CHAMPIONS
JACK LORIMER'S HOLIDAYS
L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
New England Building, Boston, Mass.



“ A LEAN AND GRIZZLED OLD MAN WAS STANDING AT THE
DOOR OF THE TENT.”

(See page 51.)

Walter L. Sawyer

JACK LORIMER'S HOLIDAYS

OR

MILLVALE HIGH IN CAMP

By

Winn Standish *pend*

AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN JACK LORIMER," "JACK
LORIMER'S CHAMPIONS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

FRANK P. FAIRBANKS

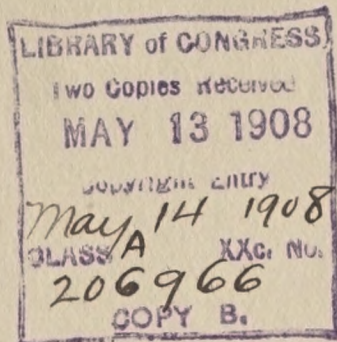


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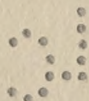
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TO
Carroll Farmer

PREFACE

IN "Jack Lorimer's Champions," published a year ago, I told the story of a High School Baseball League and the championship won by Millvale High. I promised, then, to complete the account of that summer's doings and tell how the Millvale boys camped out, and the promise is redeemed in this book.

"Captain Jack Lorimer," the first volume in the Lorimer Series, pictured Millvale's ups and downs in football, hockey, and various indoor sports. "Jack Lorimer's Champions," the second volume, was devoted chiefly to baseball, but dealt also with rowing, swimming, and field and track events. In the present story, Lorimer and his friends not only go camping, but they box, wheel, motor, figure in a horse-race, play jokes, plan strange inventions, and systematically seek for health — which itself is happiness.

Probably many a reader will feel a special, sympathetic interest in Charles Pratt and Will Van Dusen, who came to Captain Jack that they

might be guided in strength-building habits. I trust their progress will encourage other boys to lead the wholesome life of athletes, and — since, in a story, it is hardly possible to go into details — I hope that at some future time, in a different kind of book, I may be able to take up the whole subject of exercise and training, and treat it as fully as Captain Jack's admirers seem to wish.

In the next volume in this series I shall tell the story of "Jack Lorimer's Senior Year." Meanwhile I tender acknowledgments to the Boston *Sunday Herald*, in which originally appeared the stories that have been rewritten to form the Lorimer books; and I add the hope that the young people who have stood by me so stanchly and generously will find pleasure and profit in this latest work of their friend

WINN STANDISH.

BOSTON, June 1, 1908.

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JACK LORIMER'S HOLIDAYS

CHAPTER I

IN CAMP WITH A RESTLESS WILDCAT

It was the mascot and the "hassistant mascot" — Royal Burr, wildcat, and January Jones, fat boy — that first suggested to Captain Jack Lorimer the scheme of a camping party; and though the athletes of Millvale High have teased January about it until he hates to be reminded of his little excursion, the story ought to be told, by way of introduction.

The summer vacation was just beginning. Most of Lorimer's closest friends, Terry McGrady, Tom Bell, Phil Kavanagh, Ned Harriott and others had graduated, leaving Captain Jack a year behind them, that year representing the time he had taken from his books to help his father in certain business perplexities. Lorimer would be a senior in his turn, when school reopened; but the boys he liked best would no longer be there, and so he wanted to make the

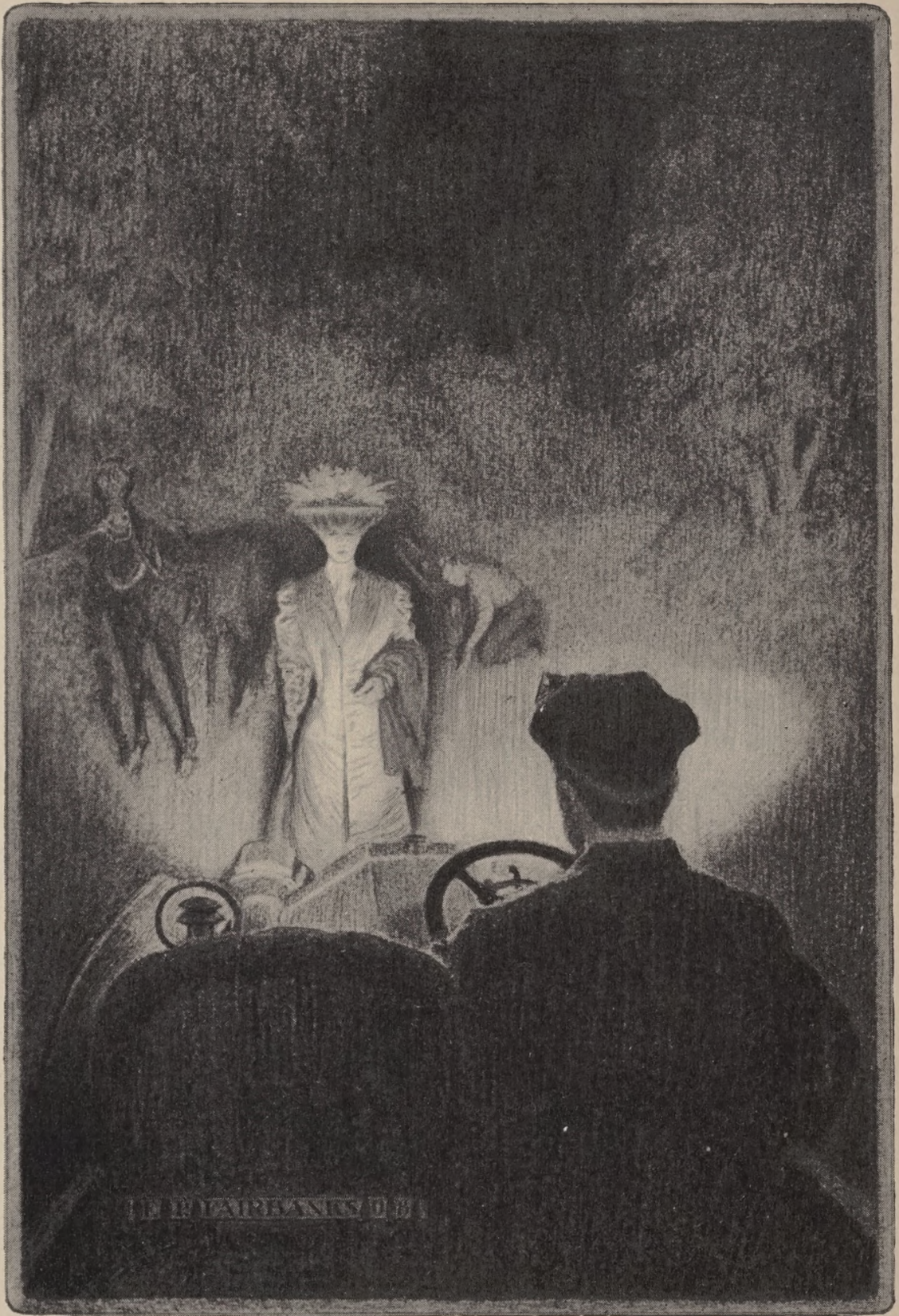
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most of this vacation before they separated, some to enter college, others to go into business.

And they had a good time in those summer months. Some of the things they did have been told in "Jack Lorimer's Champions," the preceding volume of this series. But before they had begun to do things, while, in spite of the holidays, everybody was feeling blue at the thought of the pleasant companionship which was so soon to end, — then January Jones, who felt as blue as anybody, stirred up a mild sensation, and gave Captain Jack his idea.

Readers will remember the mascot of the Millvale Athletic Club, a Canada lynx or wildcat, "Royal Burr" by name. Nor is there any need to introduce the "hassistant mascot," January Jones, — age eleven, height four feet seven inches, weight 150 pounds, — who, when his father died, came over from London "to be a Hamerican." He lived with his mother's cousin, Mr. O'Brien, the janitor of Millvale High; he felt as if he belonged to the school and the gym; and when the older fellows found things dull, things were dull for January.

His most depressing days came in early July, when the Fourth was past and there was no other excitement in sight. On one of the worst, as he dawdled along Main Street, looking in every window like a country cousin, Fate fixed his eye on



“ THE YOUNG WOMAN WAS OLD MARLOW’S DAUGHTER.”

a newsdealer's display, and he saw a small red pamphlet bearing the title, "Camping in the Woods." January stared at it awhile, then he went in and bought it, and lastly he went over and sat down on the City Hall steps and read the whole thing through.

The pamphlet pretended to tell how a boy or a party of boys could go into the woods, build a tent of boughs and saplings, and have a fine time without spending much money. It was written by some one who knew very little about the subject. But January knew less; he did not realize that the author's instructions were neither clear nor practical, and he thought he had found a treasure.

"Hi'll do it, blow me!" January muttered, as he read. "While Hi'm stuck on me hinvention, Hi might as well be on the loose, what? Hi'll take Royal hout, too. 'E'll be pleased to get some fresh hair."

Whose "hair" the wildcat was liable to get, January didn't stop to think. But of course the reader understands that what the fat boy intended for Royal was a little outing and some wholesome exercise.

There were things to be attended to, though, beforehand. The first thing was to buy a stout collar and a light, strong chain; and the next was to hunt up Mr. Seth Lanard, an old citizen who stood by the athletes through thick and thin,

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and proffer a request — which that generous friend acceded to at once.

“Build a tent in my woods?” he repeated. “Certain, certain, build a dozen if ye want to, January, — only be careful, if ye make any fires, that ye don’t let ’em spread.”

Mr. Lanard was busy, and the fat boy didn’t explain the scheme, and, in fact, felt rather relieved that no questions were asked. First he wanted to build his tent and set up housekeeping. To-morrow he would astonish people by showing them what he had done and telling them that he and Royal had spent the night in the open.

Breaking through the underbrush at a point where it was more dense than common, a shield that promised privacy, January got into Lanard’s Woods. He had a small hatchet and a coil of clothes-line, and, when he found three saplings that grew conveniently near, he began operations by bending down the tops and tying ^{you} them together.

Across the tops he laid hemlock boughs. Around three sides of the space thus covered he drove stakes that he found in a small clearing just beyond his hut, interweaving the stakes with more boughs. More boughs still gave him a floor and bed in one — and then he stood off and surveyed his handiwork with honest pride.

“Hi’ll go and get me tea,” he said. “Then Hi’ll feed Royal Burr. But Hi won’t try to bring

'im hover till it's darker, when there's nothing houtdoors to stir 'im hup, ye know."

Yawning hard, and feeling as if he would much rather stay where he was, the fat boy set out for home. But on second thought, since to carry his provisions and manage the wildcat might be almost too much of an undertaking, he decided not to go home for supper. He got a little luncheon at a shop, bought his supplies and a small dark lantern, and made a second trip to his hut to leave the articles he expected to use in the morning.

To say that January was tired, by the time he got back to the gym, is to put it mildly. He ached all over, and his eyes were trying hard to shut. He had to keep awake and pretend to be lively, not to run the risk of exposing his secret. But it was hard work, harder than building the hut, and he was thankful that it was a warm night, so that by 9 o'clock or thereabouts all the fellows had drifted away. Then January got out his collar and chain and went over to the wildcat's cage.

"Come hon, hold sport!" he said. "We're going for a walk, ye know! 'Old hup, now! Lift your 'ead and we'll 'ave you fixed in a jiff!"

The thing was simpler than any one could have anticipated. Royal caught the gleam of the bosses on the collar, and they held his attention until the collar was passed around his neck and

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clasped at the top. He seemed a little nervous, then, but he contented himself with making one or two dabs at it; and he was so curious about what might be going to happen that he neglected to scratch or snarl; he only waited.

"Hout you come, hold son!" January said gaily. "Captain Jack says Hi didn't hought to take you hinto the street, so we'll go hacross the fields, what?" At the words he gave a gentle tug at the chain, and Royal, nothing loth, stretched his lithe frame and came out of the cage.

Never once in a thousand attempts could January do what he did that night, for, in front or behind him or at his side, the wildcat padded along like a lamb. It was partly the strangeness of it, perhaps, for months had passed since Royal had felt the ground under his paws; partly the solitude and silence, for they met neither man nor beast; partly the animal's confidence in his leader; partly the restraint of the collar and chain.

Anyway, there was no protest on the wildcat's part. He even followed tamely through that hedge of underbrush, which pricked his sides and made him sneeze. Bursting with exultation, January led him up to the hut and slipped the ring on the end of his chain over the head of the stake.

"'Ow's this, hold sport?" the fat boy chuckled.

IN CAMP WITH A WILDCAT 7

“ Ain’t this prime, what? Ho, no, Hi guess yes! Go to bed now, Royal, and when you wake hup you’ll ’ave an happetite! ”

Almost as if the wildcat understood, he curled up on his bed of boughs. Retreating his own length into the scant shelter of his roof, January himself lay down. He had nothing but the boughs under him, and nothing over him, but he could have slept to-night on the soft side of a plank, and —

He slept.

The gleam of dawn was in the sky when he awoke — with a start, if not a jump. The strangeness of the place was heavy upon him. For a second he did not understand. But somehow he felt that something had happened.

He sat up and gazed around in a bewildered way. The first thing he saw was the paper that had held Royal Burr’s breakfast — four pounds of chuck beef. The paper was empty. Evidently Royal had eaten his breakfast.

He remembered, then, and glanced toward the stake over which he had slipped the ring at the end of the wildcat’s chain.

The stake had been uprooted and lay flat on the ground. The chain was no longer attached to it. The wildcat was gone!

CHAPTER II

THE WANDERINGS OF ROYAL BURR

AT just about the time when January, suddenly awakened, was staring at the place where the wildcat had been, and wondering what had become of him, Jabez Ross, an old farmer whose place was nearest Lanard's Woods on the north side, was roused with as sharp a shock, by a dream that his barn had been struck by lightning.

It was very real — so real that, though he could hear the horses neighing and stamping, the cattle bellowing and the poultry cackling furiously, he thought for a minute or two that this was all part of the dream. It needed that his wife should nudge him three or four times, and ask what he was thinking of, and why he didn't go to see what ailed the stock, before he hurried on his trousers and started for the barn.

Never was there a more terrific din than that which he heard as he drew near. Seldom had Jabez been more frightened. He was tempted to run the other way and let his property take its chances. But, if he did that, his wife would be "after him," and, nerved by the dread of her,



“JABEZ PICKED UP A STICK FOR A WEAPON.”

THE WANDERINGS OF BURR 9

Jabez picked up a stick for a weapon, and cautiously threw open the barn door.

As he did so something sprang out at him — something with blazing eyes that threatened death and destruction. It landed on his shoulder. For an instant it clung there, the terrible eyes glaring into his, the long talons piercing his flesh like so many hot needles. Then with a scream that was almost as loud as the old man's yell of fear and pain, it bounded away.

But the backward kick of the hind legs, with which the creature launched itself, came so strongly and so suddenly that it flung old Jabez on his face; and, when he managed to get on his feet again, the thing that had assaulted him was out of sight.

"By glory, that must 'a' been a lion or a tiger!" he muttered.

That it was something fierce and muscular, he was sure when he looked inside, for three of his hens had had their heads snapped off and the flank of one of the cows showed the rake of heavy claws. But the mischief, whatever it was, was done, and the farmer closed the barn and went back to the house, resolved to set hunters on the "varmint's" trail.

One, however, was already busy. That was January.

When Royal Burr literally "pulled up stakes" and started to seek his fortune, he left clues

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behind, thanks to that dragging chain which probably prevented him taking to the trees. There were not many places where the fat boy was puzzled to find the marks it made, and they led him pretty straight to Ross's barn, to an open window over the stalls.

January listened a minute, and heaved a sigh of relief when he heard no sounds of battle and bloodshed. Then he scouted toward the house. Old Jabez was just coming out, looking ferocious enough to bite off nails. January lifted his cap.

"Good morning, Mr. Ross," he said. "Hany-thing 'appened, what?"

"Been some kind of varmint in my barn, if ye call that anything!" the old man answered sourly. "Killed three hens and scratched a cow and give me a good rakin', consarn his pictur'!"

"Where is 'e? Did you catch 'im, what?" cried January, eagerly.

"Ketch him! Ketch a streak o' lightnin' with claws onto it! I was mighty willin' to see him go! But I kind o' cal'late a bullet 'll ketch him, if I can find some fellers with guns!"

"Ho, no, Mr. Ross; ho, no!" was January's earnest rejoinder. "That's Royal Burr, ye know, hour tame wildcat. Hi'll pay for hall the 'arm 'e does. Hand Hi say, Mr. Ross, if 'e comes back again, Hi wish you'd 'old hon to 'im, ye know!" January added as he turned to pick up the trail.

"Tame wildcat, hey? I be blessed if I want

THE WANDERINGS OF BURR 11

to meet any wild wildcats, then!" the old man growled. "As for holdin' on to him, if he comes back when I'm outdoors here, I cal'late you'll see me shin that 'ere lightnin' rod!"

"Which way did 'e go, what?"

"I can't tell ye. He set me goin' t'other way."

But here again, after some little search, the fat boy found the tracks. The ring on the end of the wildcat's chain was a fine rubbish-collector, and every time Royal leaped forward he must have taken quite a heap of odds and ends along with him. They blazed a path that almost anybody might have followed.

Possibly the animal stopped to rest, once in awhile, for after half an hour January found he was getting "warm." The tracks crossed a road; and in the road a hatless man who was covered with dust and had a lump on his forehead was jumping up and down and using language that made the fat boy's ears tingle.

"'Ello! What's hup?" he asked.

Never mind what the man answered. The gist of it was that he was dozing on his wagon, driving to market, when Royal Burr came out of the bushes by the roadside. Then the horse bolted, pitched him, the driver, out, and was probably by this time half-way to Boston.

Here was a case where the fat boy thought it would be safer not to admit any responsibility

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until after the victim cooled down. But he sympathized, and managed to find out his name and residence, meaning to adjust damages later on. Then January plunged into the underbrush on the other side of the road — and within five minutes found Royal Burr.

That ring on the end of his chain had been the ruin of Royal. Somehow as it dragged along it had slipped over the end of a stout, half-buried root, and far enough up the root so that the beast could not tear it loose. He had done some energetic scratching to free himself, and he was snarling and clawing furiously when January broke through the bushes. But when he saw the fat boy he looked, January thought, as if he was ashamed and sorry.

“ Trouble enough, hold sport! ” January said. “ You didn’t hought to leave your friends that away and go to killing ’ens and scaring ’osses, what? Hi’m ashamed of you, Royal, blow me! ”

The wildcat made another dab at the root, as if to say that that was the thing to blame, and then he lay down, blinking at January.

“ Hi don’t know ’ow to get you back to the gym,” January went on, shaking his head at the beast. “ Too far to walk you hin the daytime, ye know. Ho, yus, the bloomink camp’s guv hup, Royal! ” he added sorrowfully. “ Hif you won’t stay, Hi can’t ’ave you, ye know! ”

“ Hi’m going for to take a turn of rope haround

THE WANDERINGS OF BURR 13

your collar and that tree," he said, suiting the action to the word. "Then Hi'm going for to telephone the gym, and 'ave your cage sent hup. Hand you want to keep still and be'ave yourself while Hi'm away, you 'ear me? "

Whether he understood or not, the wildcat made no protest; and when January returned from a trip to the nearest telephone, and again an hour later, when the cage arrived on an express wagon, in charge of Captain Jack and Lou Mains, he was still lamblike. Once more, when January ordered him into the cage, Royal went as meekly as if he thought he belonged there.

But January felt none of the pride in that, that he had a right to feel. He was too disappointed over the failure of his enterprise. Indeed, he took it so much to heart that Lorimer wouldn't scold him for the dangerous risk he had run and to which he had exposed others.

"Never mind, January. You haven't wasted your time," Captain Jack said soothingly. "Lou and I were saying, as we came along, that we might not have thought of camping out, if you hadn't started the scheme. As it is, we'll get up a party, by and by, and of course we'll take you."

January looked down at the wildcat and wagged a finger at him reproachfully.

"You 'ear that, Royal Burr? " he said. "You

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might 'ave gone too, hif you'd be'aved yourself!"

But, though he didn't say him nay, Captain Jack, for one, had serious doubts about it.

As he looked forward to the summer camp, in these first moments of plan-making, he saw a limited number of intimate friends going away to the woods and, for a fortnight or more, escaping every wearisome responsibility. Yet he was soon to realize that — even though the wildcat should be left behind! — the size of the party would outrun his estimate, and it would include, besides his friends, some, strangers almost, to whom he would be bound to render sympathy and constant aid.

CHAPTER III

WHEN WILLIE AND CHARLES VOLUNTEERED

"YOUR name is Lorimer? Something of an athlete, I understand? Well, I've been having you looked up, Lorimer, and I've about decided that I'll have you act as a kind of companion and adviser to my Willie."

Courtney Van Dusen had spoken — a short, stout, grizzled man of sixty, probably the richest man in Millvale, and the kind of person who thinks his money gives him the right to "boss" everybody. Though he was in business in Boston, he had recently bought a splendid estate in the suburban city, and people said he had set up a magnificent establishment, with a train of servants and all that. But Captain Jack, who never paid much attention to gossip, had no idea of the make-up of the family, and didn't know "Willie" from a stick of wood.

"Willie is my son, the only child," Van Dusen went on, pompously. "Naturally he has been petted by everybody, and luxuries of all kinds have been at his command from the moment of his birth. In one sense that is proper, for it is desirable that he should realize his position and

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opportunities. Possibly, however, we have not always weighed the effect upon his health, as we should have done. I find him now showing weak, nervous and irritable tendencies which my physician advises are best to be corrected by physical training. So I have decided to let you take him in hand."

"With or without my own consent?" Lorimer suggested. His manner was calm and smiling, but Van Dusen had rasped him, and he was bound the millionaire should realize that this was a matter it took two to settle.

"Why, why, I propose to pay you for any service you may render!" the other sputtered.

"Provided I agree to render any service, I shall not hesitate to accept payment," was Lorimer's cool rejoinder. "But it would have to be clearly understood that, if I undertook the task you mention, I should have complete control of your son's food, his sleeping hours, and his amusements, as well as his exercise; and unless the lad seemed to me worth working over, I wouldn't bother with him at any price!"

Van Dusen gasped. Probably not for years had he been talked to so plainly. But as a business man he knew that nobody but a fool would accept responsibility unless he could have authority to back it; so, instead of making the furious reply that for a moment was on the tip of his tongue, he actually consented to argue.

"I could probably agree to any reasonable condition — it being understood, of course, that Willie should not associate to any great extent with social inferiors," he said. But at this Lorimer laughed once more.

"It's not easy to train effectively unless a fellow has the stimulus of measuring himself with other fellows who are working along the same line," he answered. "Your boy would meet intelligent boys whose habits are right and whose talk is clean. Do you think they'd do him any harm?"

Van Dusen couldn't say yes to that, and he wouldn't say no; but before he decided on his answer, Captain Jack added calmly:

"Of course they might, though, if your boy set up a claim that he was a good deal better than they, because his father has more money. If he kept harping on that string, I'd be tempted to give him a larruping myself!"

The millionaire's face reddened and he looked ready to burst. But Lorimer had called on his invitation and must have the privileges of a guest; and doubtless deep down in his heart Van Dusen knew he was right. There was silence for a minute or two.

"In the event that you took charge of my boy's training, how would you begin?" Van Dusen asked, at length.

"Probably by taking him on a camping trip

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and letting him rough it in the woods for awhile."

"That's the stuff! I'm going, papa!"

The interruption was as much of a surprise to Van Dusen as it was to Lorimer. Yet perhaps the man should have been prepared for it, for it was caused by his son, the subject of their discussion, — a white, scrawny, undersized lad of eleven or twelve years. That was the first impression Captain Jack received as the boy dashed aside the portières and stood before them, fairly quivering with excitement.

"I heard what you said," he cried to Lorimer. "I won't be whipped, you just remember, but I want to go camping out, real old Indian way! Fix it, papa!"

Van Dusen looked at him helplessly.

"You might miss the people you have here to wait on you," he suggested.

"I don't care! I want to play Indian!"

"Who do you think you'd play with? Mr. Lorimer would be too busy attending to things to have much time for play."

Again Jack laughed.

"If your son went with me, Mr. Van Dusen," he said, "he would simply be one of twenty boys. He would wait on himself, take his turn at the rough and dirty work, and enjoy precisely the same consideration, no more, that every other lad received. I should watch to see that he did

not attempt any exercise or sport that was beyond his strength; but contact with fellows who are older, stronger and wiser would be an important part of his training, and his standing in the party would be such as he won by his own manly qualities."

It was straight talk, but Captain Jack meant that it should be so. The Van Dusens, father and son, were probably saturated with the pride of their money, and they must begin by learning that, with the Lorimer crowd, money didn't count.

Van Dusen himself took it better than Jack had expected. He bristled a little at first, but as his eye roved from his own boy to Lorimer, he calmed down and grew thoughtful.

"Can you make him as — as strong, symmetrical and well set-up as yourself?" the father asked.

"Undoubtedly — if there is no organic weakness."

"Say, when are you going camping out?" the boy interrupted.

"In about a week, perhaps. I shall go into the country — to a place called Four Corners — to try to make arrangements, to-morrow."

"Can I go with you and see the place?"

"No."

The boy frowned and looked as if he was on the point of flying into a rage. But Lorimer

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caught his eye and held it steadily, and he thought better of it.

"How much will the camping trip cost?" the father inquired.

"Railroad fares included, probably seven or eight dollars a week."

"And how much am I to pay for your services?"

"Nothing, until I decide whether to undertake the care of your son. If you will send him down to our gym at, say, 7 o'clock to-morrow morning, our director, Mr. Mains, and I will give him a thorough going-over and form an idea of what he needs."

"But Willie seldom gets up before 9!" Van Dusen objected.

"Willie will have to learn to get up!" Captain Jack said firmly.

"Why, of course I'll get up! I'll be there!" the boy himself added. That was a good sign, and Lorimer felt more friendly. He smiled as he rose to go.

"All right, then, Will, I'll see you to-morrow morning, and put you through a course of sprouts," he said. "You can be strong if you're willing to work for it and live rightly, but I want you — and your father — to remember that nobody can help you unless you try to help yourself!"

With that Lorimer made his escape, literally

so, for the boy wanted to keep him; and, smiling over this odd interview, hurried down to the gym.

He did not look forward with any great enthusiasm to the task of training young Van Dusen. The money it might fairly be worth — and he was resolved not to take any more — would hardly compensate for the annoyances involved in trying to keep his pupil straight in the midst of an idle, self-indulgent household. But, only a little while before, he had been telling Terry McGrady that they ought to “catch ’em younger” — pay more attention to the small boys and see that they were started right — and how could he consistently decline this opportunity?

“I’ll try it,” he muttered, as he entered the gym; and then Lou Mains called him to the telephone, and he went forward to find himself booked for more trouble.

“Mr. Lorimer?” came the message over the line. “This is Mr. Horton of Roxbridge. I understand that you plan a camping party. Would you be willing to take my nephew, Charles Pratt? He expresses a great admiration for you, and I am sure you could do him good.”

Lorimer thought a minute.

“Our arrangements have not been completed, Mr. Horton,” he said. “I shall have to ask you to wait a day or two for a definite answer. I’ll

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call you up, perhaps to-morrow night, or Wednesday. Good-bye."

Another fellow who wanted them to give him a chance! This was beginning to grow monotonous, thought Captain Jack, as he turned away. And, yet, if anybody ought to be helped, it was surely the fellows nobody liked, and the fellows who needed it most!

May Roxton's sweet face grew tender and pitiful when Lorimer stated the case to her, — the one girl who had his fullest confidence, — and she spoke quickly. "I know what'll you do, Jack," she said.

"It isn't altogether my affair, remember," he suggested. But once again May made emphatic answer.

"Then I know what the other fellows will do," she rejoined. "They'll pity the little Van Dusen boy; and, when they think it over, they'll feel the same way about Pratt. Perhaps it's Pratt's own fault that he hasn't many friends — but just fancy how lonely he must be! And just remember how good everybody has been to us Millvale young people, helping us to get a gym and a boat-house and a tennis-court and everything we wanted! Seems to me we ought to be glad of an opportunity to pass on a kindness!"

Lorimer shook his head doubtfully. May had spoken just as he expected. He would have been surprised and disappointed had she taken

a less generous view. Yet in the case of Pratt, at least, he realized that all the campers would have a right to be consulted, and the situation was not so simple as she seemed to think.

CHAPTER IV

JEFF'S CAMP-SITE AT FOUR CORNERS

It was Lou Mains, director of the Millvale Athletic Club's gymnasium, who in two of his pithy sentences — for Mains was not much of a talker — summed up young Will Van Dusen.

“Eating wrong, sleeping wrong, twisted every way!” Mains muttered. “Ought to have him under your eye the whole twenty-four hours, to do him any good!”

Van Dusen was truly a discouraging proposition. His limbs were in the right place and his organs seemed sound, but that was about all one could say. He was thin, weak and undeveloped, and the routine of his daily life tended to make him worse. Yet there were little things cropping up in the talk with him that led Lorimer to think the boy had will, courage and “stick-to-it-iveness.” Everybody had done their best to spoil him; but, though they had made him something of a snob, they had not uprooted from his nature a foundation of manliness which a wise friend could build upon.

There was no time just now, however, to do more than “size him up.” Lorimer gave him some

hints on diet, and told him to go to bed at 8 o'clock and come to the gym next morning. Then Captain Jack joined Jeff Bussey, a schoolmate in Millvale High, and they started for "Four Corners, 'way off in the country, six miles from a railroad, the place I came from" — as Jeff sometimes described it.

Walking down Main Street, ahead of the boys, was a plump little man who carried a butterfly net. It was not likely that he expected to make a capture in that locality, but "just for encouragement," Jeff, who was a ventriloquist, sent his voice forward to the other's ear.

"Hm-m-m! B-z-z-z!" The plump little man jumped and flourished his net wildly. Evidently he was near-sighted; and as Jeff repeated the insect call he rose on tiptoe and circled slowly round, one hand shading his eyes, the other, with the net, held ready for a swoop.

"Can't ye catch your bug, professor?" Jeff asked as they came up to him.

"I do not see! See you?" was the professor's answer. They left him dancing about the sidewalk, waiting for another call that might show the insect's whereabouts. But Jeff did not give it, though he chuckled as he looked backward.

"You've heard about the private school that Artemus Blodgett — the beauty we used to call 'Blackbeard, the Pirate,' when he was assistant in Millvale High — that Blodgett's goin' to

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start? Well, that's Prof. D'Estrees, his French teacher," Bussey explained. "Prof. Distress, the boys call him.

"Seems the professor's goin' to spend the summer here, waitin' for the school to open, and he's amusing himself with natural history. Guess he doesn't know much about it. Our Principal, Mr. Blaisdell, sort o' smiles when anybody speaks of his excursions. But then, as long as the old man's havin' fun, what more do you want?"

Captain Jack nodded and smiled. It was fun that they themselves were planning.

When Lorimer made the first suggestion of a summer camp, Jeff Bussey had come to the front with the demand that it be established at Four Corners. There he himself owned land — "all kinds o' land, not to speak of rocks and water" — and the fellows could choose a location for themselves and feel sure that nobody would have a right to disturb or annoy them.

Then again, they knew the Four Corners young people, Harry Lee and his comrades, and at any time when the usual sports of a camp grew tiresome they could get up a ball game or a 'cross-country run. And there was an advantage, as Jeff pointed out, in camping in a friendly neighbourhood, since "accidents will happen" and one never knew when he might need some kind of help.

All these arguments were sound, as Lorimer

agreed. And Jeff was bound to have his way. When school closed he was supposed to return to Four Corners, to spend the summer with his uncle and guardian; but he had passed more time in Millvale than at the other place, and, morning, noon and night, he had besought Captain Jack to come to the Corners for a day, that he, Jeff, might "show him."

To-day Jeff had arranged to be met at the Junction, and it was one of his own teams in which the boys rode to and beyond the square and into the hilly part of the town.

"Bussey's Woods, over yonder," Jeff said with a long sweep around the horizon. "I mean it! Two hundred acres, more or less, most of it tall timber and fit to cut. You can tell what I think of our Millvale crowd, by my invitin' the boys to camp in it. Mighty few I'd trust that far! The average city gang would have it afire within twenty-four hours, I cal'late!"

"I don't feel much like taking the risk myself, Jeff!" Lorimer said soberly.

"Oh, shucks! I'm goin' to be with ye, ain't I? If I'm willing to chance it, you ought to be! See here!"

He jumped from the buggy as they came to the end of what seemed to have been used as a wood-road, hitched the horse, and led the way into a clearing ringed around by tall trees, at the foot of a great ledge.

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"Quarter of an acre, smooth as a floor, for the tents," Jeff chuckled. "Trees to hitch anything to, from horizontal bars to hammocks. Ledge cuts off the north and east winds. Boiling spring, finest water in the State, within two minutes' walk — and the river's nearer than it is to our gym in Millvale. Beat it if ye can!"

"It's a beautiful spot, sure enough," Lorimer admitted.

"Live on the fish you catch, if you want to save money," Jeff rattled on. "Plenty of milk and eggs to be bought within a quarter of a mile — or I'll drive over and steal 'em from Uncle Isaiah, if you say so! Store's a mile and a half away, but then, we won't want much of anything from the store. Beat it if ye can!"

It was an ideal location, on every account, and the more Lorimer looked at it, the better he liked it. But he would not definitely agree to take it for a camping-ground until Uncle Isaiah, Jeff's guardian, had heard about the plan and given his approval — which he did, to a certain extent, though he was not so enthusiastic as his nephew.

"Jeff says you're well-behaved fellers," he admitted, "and he'll be there himself to see that you don't set the woods afire, so I don't know's I've any objections. All is, I'm glad it ain't me that's got to sleep outdoors!"

So it was settled; and now that Captain Jack had promised to fetch his party to Four Corners,

Jeff consented to remain at home. Probably he would be of very little use to Uncle Isaiah, for he would be too busy getting things ready for the campers. "But there won't be so much danger of our forgettin' what the boy looks like," the old man said.

It was a pleasant afternoon, and a lively one, that the fellows spent with Harry Lee and others, and the time for Lorimer to leave came all too soon. Jeff drove him back to the station and acted as though he had half a mind to turn his horse loose and jump on the train.

"Give my best regards to everybody," he said. "The whole o' Millvale — yes, the Blodgetts and old Webb and Fitzpatrick and all! Say, I'm homesick already! For the sake of goin' back to Millvale, I'd almost be willin' to pitch in and help Prof. Distress hunt bugs!"

CHAPTER V

PROF. DISTRESS MAKES A DISCOVERY

SINCE Captain Jack paid little heed to gossip, he had not heard of Blodgett's assistant, Prof. D'Estrees, or, if he had heard, had forgotten. His younger brother Tom, however, could have told him all about the old Frenchman. In fact, Tom and his chum, Roger Ahearn, had been keeping Prof. "Distress" busy for several days.

It was a practical joke they were working at, of course. That was the reason why they kept it to themselves. The elder Lorimer didn't believe in practical jokes, he thought most of them either silly or mean, and, when Tom and Roger had anything of the kind on hand, they were generally quiet about it.

This one would probably never have been thought of, if Blodgett's French master had not gone into bad company. He was harmless enough. But he was Blodgett's man; and when Jim Fitzpatrick began to be seen with him — doubtless attracted by cigarettes, of which the older man was lavish — the doom of Prof. Distress was sealed. For in every plot against the Mill-

vale athletes Fitzpatrick had had a share, and he was such a mean and cowardly rascal that it seemed proper to strike at him "on general principles."

What to do was a question. The professor's "bug-hunting," as the boys called it, seemed to be his weak point, because, though his enthusiasm was boundless, his knowledge was evidently small. But the conspirators puzzled long over a way to catch the professor and Fitz — until, one day in Roger's room, Tom's eye fell on two curious objects which he promptly took down to examine.

Horns, claws, toes — Tom couldn't make them out. Whatever they were, they spread from a piece of leather-covered bone, capped with silver; and, holding that end, young Lorimer amused himself by dabbing them against a table, until Roger noticed what he had.

"Queer things for a present, eh?" Roger said. "Fellow we used to know sent 'em to my sister Rose, from Australia. They're an emu's feet. Of course she didn't want 'em, so she gave 'em to me."

Idly Tom went on flattening the talons against the table. All at once the glimmer of a grin spread over his face.

"Say!" he cried. "Let's set the professor and Fitz to hunting this bird. Keep 'em out of mischief, you know."

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Roger stared a minute. Then he, too, began to grin. "Scatter some footprints around, you mean?" he said.

"That's the idea. Wish we had a sandy soil, like that in Winterton! I tell you, though, there are some patches of sand over back of our boat-house. We could start the tracks there, and then we could make the bird do some long jumps, see? Let's go and look over the ground."

It took a long half-day to get things ready. But when they were fixed, the conspirators contrived to meet where Fitzpatrick's younger brother could overhear, while Tom told Roger about curious tracks in the sand, over beyond the boat-house, and Roger suggested that probably Prof. Distress would give a dollar to know.

Young Fitz listened with all his ears, and, when he thought the others weren't noticing, slipped away. At a safe distance, Tom and Roger followed, and placed themselves where they could watch.

They were in the boat-house when the two Fitzpatrick boys, with Prof. Distress in tow, went by toward the sand-patches. They saw young Fitz, the first discoverer, stiffen like a pointer, and the Frenchman go down on his knees and stay there for as much as five minutes. And it was worth studying, that footprint. Tom had lain in the grass, that he might leave no tracks, and stretched his arm full length to make it.

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Finally Prof. Distress arose and began excitedly to give instructions. It was easy to guess what they would be, and Tom and Roger nudged each other as they saw him and the two Fitzpatricks walk off, eyes on the ground, keeping a few feet apart.

The professor himself found the next footprint, and waved his arms wildly. Young Fitz signalled the third. And thus they chased the trail over two or three square miles of territory, until finally it seemed to end.

Tom and Roger had been careful not to overdo the thing, and sometimes there would be a space of fifty or sixty yards between one set of footprints and the next. It must have seemed to the professor that the mysterious bird was either taking short flights or long leaps. But never for an instant did he and his companions doubt that they had made a great discovery and, when they ceased their explorations for the day and started homeward, the professor was jabbering his delight at the top of his voice, in three or four different languages.

Next morning Tom slipped out and fixed up another mile or two of trail, while in the afternoon he and Roger between them made the bird start out in an entirely different direction and wander erratically. Thus for nearly a week the professor and the Fitzpatricks were lured up and down and round about. And then, emboldened by

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their success, the boys put together all their pocket money and bought an egg.

It may have been an emu's egg, or an ostrich's. It was a large one, anyhow, and solely on that account Tom and Roger persuaded an old sailor to spare it from his collection of curios.

In the opening, where the egg had been blown, they carefully inserted, rolled in a little ball, a single word printed in bold type, which they cut from an auctioneer's handbill. They filled the egg with a mixture of the worst-smelling liquids that Roger could find in his father's drug-store, and plugged the holes.

It was quite a delicate operation to "plant" that egg. They chose a sheltered hollow which no one else would be likely to stumble upon, but which the bug-hunters could hardly miss, and laid several trails, imprinted with much scratching. In a little cavity they left their big egg, and went away to pray that none but the right people should find it.

In fact, they watched the hollow all one day, to make sure that the egg fell into the proper hands. Prof. Distress and his assistants were at work that day chasing up an old trail which ended at a hedge fence, away over by Doverdale.

Finally the egg was found. Lying behind some shrubbery, a hundred yards away, Tom and Roger saw the professor come upon the hollow and stand transfixed. They could almost hear

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the jumble of words with which he welcomed the great discovery, and they knew he was perspiring with excitement.

Carefully as if it had been a baby, he lifted the big egg. Taking off his hat, he placed the treasure in it and took the hat in his arms. When he led the way toward town, it was time for Roger and Tom to appear. Prof. Distress hailed them instantly.

"Ah! Vitnesses!" he shrieked. "See you!" He summoned them to look in the hat.

"What is it?" asked Roger, indifferently.

"It ees ze egg of vat you call ze bird extinct!"

"Stink? Yes, I noticed that. What you —"

"Non, non! Ze bird been — vat you call — l'inconnu — not known — on zis continong for long time — million years!" shrieked the professor.

"What you going to do with it?" Tom and Roger seemed suitably impressed, and it never occurred to the Fitzpatricks, much less to the professor, that there was any joke afoot, much less that they were in it.

"Going to sell it, of course," the elder Fitzpatrick said quickly. "Museums pay big money for curiosities like that!"

Prof. Distress cast a contemptuous glance at him.

"It is not of ze money zat — vat you call — men of science think!" he answered. "It ees la gloire — vat you call honneur!"

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"Rats! Who put you on to those tracks? Wasn't it my brother?"

Prof. Distress stood still a moment and looked from one Fitzpatrick to the other. His lip curled.

"I buy ze egg from you," he said curtly. "Zen I — I gif it!"

"That'll be all right," Jim Fitzpatrick answered. "All is, you know, I ain't giving away my share of something that's worth money!"

Tom and Roger exchanged significant glances. This was not working out just as they had planned. The last thing they had thought of was that the Fitzpatricks should get any money out of the professor; and somehow, though at that moment they did not see the way, they meant to spoil Jim's little scheme.

But Fate did that.

Above the boat-house the bank is steep. One has to do a kind of scrambling run in order to descend it; and the professor, with the hat held between his outstretched hands, could not pick and choose his steps.

The Fitzpatricks were in advance. The professor was behind. Barely had he stepped from the edge when he felt himself going. But it was not his feet he thought of; he was hanging to the hat that held the precious egg. A wild and frantic shriek warned his companions that he was in danger.

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"I fall — ze egg — catch!" he cried; and Jim Fitzpatrick, turning quickly, caught it.

Not as the professor hoped. Not as Jim could have wished. Shooting from the hat as the professor stumbled, the egg took Jim in the forehead. Into a million pieces flew the time-worn shell, and the filthy contents filled his eyes and mouth and ran from his head to his feet.

And it was while Jim stood sputtering and strangling, trying to free his face from the foul and odorous contents of the egg, that the professor's eye fell upon a little ball which had lodged in Jim's necktie. He plucked at it and opened it. In big red letters there flamed before his eyes the one word, SOLD.

"It ees a sold — vat you call, joke, eh?" he said grimly. "I like not solds like zis! You, here!" he beckoned Fitzpatrick the younger.

"What you want?" young Fitzpatrick asked in a surly way. Slowly and doubtfully he approached.

"Zis for you!" the professor hissed. With surprising strength, and keeping his footing marvellously well, he gripped the two Fitzpatricks by the collar. Not once, but many times, he bumped their heads together, hard; and when they were both daubed with the stuff that was in the egg, he hurled them from him, and they went rolling over and over each other down the bank.

CHAPTER VI

AN UP-AND-DOWN YOUNG MAN

THE young Van Dusen's report of his progress, such as it was, must have made an impression on the old Van Dusen. Instead of sending for Captain Jack to come to him a second time, he went to Captain Jack — stopping his auto at the diamond on his way home from the train, and waiting until an inning ended and Lorimer left the box.

"Ah, Mr. Lorimer!" he cried. "I was curious about your camping party. Have you secured the place?"

"Yes, sir. A clearing in a tract of woodland at Four Corners, a village about forty miles away. The place is sheltered, there is good water, all the supplies we shall need are accessible, and we shall have boating and swimming."

Mr. Van Dusen pursed his lips and looked thoughtful. "I'm a little afraid of the water," he said. "Boys take needless risks and — what regulations do you intend to make?"

"In the matter of boating and swimming? A beginner will always have an expert with him," Captain Jack answered. "As for other regula-

tions, there won't be any," he added with a smile, "except to keep firearms and tobacco out of camp, and light no fires without permission."

Van Dusen stood off a little and stared at the speaker. "You're pretty up-and-down, young man," he said reflectively. "Generally 'yes' or 'no' with you, isn't it?"

Lorimer laughed. "Has to be so, sir, when fellows have put you in authority," he answered. "If you don't give straight answers to straight questions, they haven't much use for you. And when I believe I'm right, I'm not very bashful about saying so."

"What can I do for your camp?" Van Dusen asked, changing the subject suddenly.

"Nothing, thank you — except to let it alone and keep away."

The millionaire frowned. But evidently he thought some explanation must be coming, and concluded to wait for it.

"We want to be independent and self-reliant," Captain Jack said. "We're going off to rough it a little and depend on ourselves for most of the things we need. If we were supplied with the luxuries of a summer resort, and waited on all around, I don't think the experience would do us much good, do you?"

"Excuse me, sir," he added hastily. "My time at bat. I'll let you know by the boy, between this and next week, what he'll need to take."

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And with that Lorimer ran over to the plate and rapped out a single.

Van Dusen lingered a little, desirous to get a clearer idea of these lads who might be some of his son's associates. They didn't seem the least bit "swell;" they were noisy, and in one sense they were "tough" — that is, they stood up to balls that looked to him as if they might have come out of a cannon. But he saw no mean or ungentlemanly action and heard no foul or profane talk, and by and by he went back to his auto, still thoughtful, and told the chauffeur, "Home."

About that time he was wondering what he could do to make things pleasant for the campers in spite of Captain Jack's "No." He regretted that negative, even though he admired the lad's decision and firmness. It struck him as out of the common and remarkable.

And yet, just then, Captain Jack in conversation with Terry McGrady was showing another side of his character — the thoughtfulness and fair-mindedness that sometimes kept him from uttering a "Yes" or "No" offhand.

"It's about that request of Mr. Horton's, Terry," he said. "For the sake of the good he thinks it might do the fellow, he wants Pratt, that nephew of his, to go camping with us. You don't like him. Neither do I. And yet the fellow needs a lift, and there's a chance that if

we took him with us and used him as we use each other, we'd make a start toward straightening him out.

"There's another thing to think of, and that's the effect on Horton himself. He's always made life a burden to the athletes of Roxbridge High, you know. Well, here he's come to athletes for help, and, if we can help, we'll be turning him around, maybe, and making things pleasanter for Horton's own fellows as long as he's head of the school.

"What are we going to say? Seems to me the question is a good deal of a sticker. Not that I couldn't settle it if it depended on me — but there are the rest of you to consider."

"You'd say 'Yes,' I take it?" Terry suggested. Captain Jack nodded.

"Say it, then! The argument that convinces you is good enough for the rest of us." But Lorimer shook his head as if his mind was not yet settled.

"I'll have two heart-to-heart talks first," he answered, "one with Principal Horton, the other with his nephew. I won't tell them that we're sacrificing ourselves to do them a kindness, but I shall try to make them understand that Nephew Charles will get a square show on condition of toeing the mark!"

They let the matter rest at that, for the time being, for suddenly Lorimer learned that there

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was need, first, of a heart-to-heart talk nearer home. Though there was no intention of unkindness behind the practical joke devised by Tom Lorimer and Roger Ahearn, it had brought about one result that Captain Jack didn't like and was bound to correct.

"You say Prof. D'Estrees went off with the idea that it was the Fitzpatricks who rigged up the egg-shell?" he repeated, when he got hold of the story — laughing in spite of himself as he heard the details of the elaborate plot which had ended with Fitz and his brother rolling down-hill. "Think that's quite fair to the Fitzpatricks?"

"Aw, what do they amount to? Who cares about them?" growled Tom.

"Yes, I know they're a measly pair, but that's all the more reason why they should have a square show. From all I hear, Prof. D'Estrees is a scholar and a gentleman, and it's rather a pity they should be driven away from a man of that kind through no fault of their own. How does it strike you?"

"Say, Jack, you know they're only sponging on him. They'd rob him if they got a chance!" Tom argued uneasily.

"Maybe, but, on the other hand, he might improve them. Why not let him find out their faults for himself?"

Tom took it rather sourly, but he couldn't say much to the contrary, and neither could

Roger, when his chum put the case to him. How they finally explained and apologized to Prof. Distress nobody ever heard. But they did, and they retained his friendship, too. Probably the Frenchman had a sense of humour!

Well for him if he had! Yet he could not have needed it more than Jack did to sustain him through all the interviews which luck appointed for the week.

Mr. Van Dusen came again and yet again to the diamond, looked on solemnly, listened attentively, and asked rather foolish questions. He meant well, and Lorimer contrived to extract some quiet amusement from the questions.

Then Captain Jack went to Roxbridge, talked with Principal Horton and Nephew Charles Pratt — and got from them a “yes” to everything he said. Here it was the everlasting “yes” that he found amusing. But he did not say so. He was bound they should understand that he was in earnest, and, though he was agreeable, he was firm.

“Charles will fix his own place with us,” he said to Mr. Horton. “If he takes things pleasantly, doesn’t try to dodge his share of the dirty work, obeys the few rules that will bind all of us — in short, plays fair — he’ll make friends and have a good time. If he lies or skulks or tries to take advantage — well, he won’t, that’s all!” And Horton agreed that that was right and just.

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“Glad to have you with us, Charles,” Captain Jack said to the boy himself. “Most of us will be strangers to you, but you’ll get along and be popular if you’ll just be good-natured and hold your end up — take the hard work with the fun, and mind the rules you don’t like, as well as those you do!” And Charles said he would do just as Captain Jack advised; and he seemed to mean it.

Thus, before anybody quite realized how time was flying, the hours and the days had slipped away and the Millvale fellows with their two queer guests were starting for Four Corners.

CHAPTER VII

THE SONG THAT TOUCHED HIS TEMPER

"JEFF, you're a wonder," cried Captain Jack. Somewhat in advance of a score of other boys, he and Bussey stood at the end of the wood-road overlooking the camp-site they had chosen the week before. But now it was more than a camp-site; it was a camp, with tents pitched, trenches cut, everything ready; and Jeff had done it all!

"A wonder, to get under, Jeff is," Terry added with that odd, nose-wrinkling smile that his friends knew so well. "Sure he's been getting under, this time, and lifted the worst load of work the crowd had to face."

"Move he be exempted from the daily drawings!" shouted Ned Harriott, and everybody roared approval. But Jeff, who had met his friends at the Junction and who had said not a word about the surprise arranged for them, was now surprised in his turn, and Captain Jack hastened to explain Ned's meaning.

"We planned to draw lots every night for a captain to have charge of everything — meals included — on the following day," he said. "Cap-

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tain will choose two assistants, and if extra work turns up, he'll have the right to call on anybody else to help. But he'll be held responsible for the housework, and if his cookery poisons us or he lets the tents blow down on us, there'll be ructions!"

"Say, you can't leave me out o' that," Jeff expostulated. "Chances are, I'm the only cook in the bunch, and I ought to have a chance to show ye!"

"Three cheers for Jeff Bussey!" called Will Chapin. And following the tribute due to Jeff's generous good-fellowship, came cheers for Bussey's Woods, Four Corners, Millvale, and half a dozen other persons and things. For it was still early afternoon, with hours of the beautiful day yet to be spent in this beautiful place, and Jeff's forethought had left the boys little to do but cheer — and amuse themselves.

And when it seemed that the yelling was over, Jeff started it up again.

"Guess we'd better do some hollerin' for Mr. Van Dusen," he remarked dryly. "He's saved us the meanest job of all — and that's the dish-washin'." He waved his hand toward a big packing-case that had already been the object of curious glances, and then, lifting the cover, displayed its contents.

"Wooden plates!" he chuckled. "Use 'em and then burn 'em. Must be many as four or

five gross here. Have a clean plate every meal, and no fussin' afterward about who's goin' to put his hands in dish-water. Tell you, I feel mighty thankful to Mr. Van Dusen. Guess he's been where they didn't have hired girls, himself."

Probably everybody except Van Dusen's son understood Jeff's meaning. But young Will, who had been looking pleased, took the words the wrong way, and his thin, sharp face grew dark.

"I want you to understand, you fellow, that my father has a full staff of servants!" he said. "I require you to apologize for your insolence at once!"

"Hey? Who trod on the little cock-sparrow's tail?" asked Jeff, in sheer bewilderment. But Captain Jack smiled at the irate small boy and corrected his mistake.

"All right, Will," he said. "Our friend Mr. Bussey was merely suggesting that your father has been in men's camping parties, where the campers had to do their own work."

"Oh!" The small aristocrat had to believe it, because Captain Jack said it. But from time to time, for the rest of the day, he cast suspicious glances at Jeff.

Most of the fellows were different in many respects from the boys Will Van Dusen had known, but Bussey was the oddest of the lot. There were times when he had the speech and manners of a gentleman; there were other times

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when he talked like a clodhopper, and both styles of behaviour seemed natural to him! This set the boy thinking of detective stories he had read. He made up his mind to watch Bussey!

Never dreaming he was under such inspection, Jeff busied himself in "fixing things." One of the articles each fellow had brought from home was a kind of empty mattress, an oblong bag of ticking, and these had to be filled with straw from a big load sent over from the farm. Jeff did more than his share of that work, and then he set up the oil stoves that were to be used for cooking, and hunted out a cleft in the ledge, at a safe distance, wherein to keep the supply of oil. Mysteriously summoning January, when these chores were done, the two armed themselves with tin pails and left the camp.

Later on it proved that they had gone after wild strawberries. "Didn't get a mess, but there's enough so everybody can have a taste," was Jeff's modest report of results.

January was not so modest, and his eyes sparkled as he looked over the table that was being set in the big dining-tent. To give the campers a fair start, their mothers had volunteered to contribute cooked food "for the first day," getting together under Mrs. Harriott's leadership and filling two boxes. The boxes had just been opened. Anybody might have known that mothers packed them, for they contained almost

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everything good to eat, from a boiled ham to a jar of jelly, and as for quantity — !

“ It’s a bloomink banquet we’re a-going to ’ave, what? ” January cried.

“ ’Tis not the first day, but the next year, the ladies were planning for,” Terry commented. “ I’m thinking the lucky lad who is captain to-morrow will have no cooking to do — he’ll just draw on the resources of the establishment.”

“ Pity we didn’t realize what we had,” suggested Captain Jack. “ We might have asked Harry Lee and a lot of the fellows over to-night to help us out.” But at that Jeff shook his head.

“ Doubt if you’d ’a’ got ’em,” he said. “ I know they talked it all over and agreed that it wouldn’t be fair to come around the camp until we’d had time to sort o’ settle down. First day or two, there’s always work turning up that nobody expected, and it’s no fun to entertain company. You know Josie Lee, Harry’s sister, is giving a lawn party for the crowd, to-morrow afternoon. If we can think of everything and get all straightened out between this and that, why, by day after to-morrow we’ll have callers.”

“ Hi’m pretty peckish!” January put in, in a plaintive tone. “ Hi could eat most of what’s hon that table meself, ye know!” So they laughed, stopped talking, and took pity on the

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fat boy. Horace White grabbed a tin pan and began to thump it lustily.

"Supper! Come to supper!" he yelled. "January's hungry!"

To others besides January that first meal in camp tasted better than any they had eaten in a long time. Fancy dishes fixed up by the Van Dusens' French cook were not to be compared, young Will thought, with this plain and wholesome food provided by the mothers. And Charles Pratt, the Roxbridge boy, fairly ate colour into his sallow cheeks.

These two made a long jump toward popularity, a little later, when they offered to help clear up. To be sure there wasn't much to be washed but knives and forks and spoons — thanks to Mr. Van Dusen's gift of wooden plates — but willingness to do one's part counts for a good deal in camp, and Will and Charles were applauded almost as liberally as Jeff had been when he refused to be released from his turn of duty.

Thus, with good feeling all around, the crowd entered on the first evening. Nobody wanted to write or read, so they folded up the table, hung some lanterns on the centre-pole of the dining-tent, and, sprawling on the grassy floor, began to sing.

In strict truthfulness it can scarcely be declared that the singing was melodious. Terry's share of it was, and there were three or four other fellows

who did no violence to the music, but they all sang, and probably the general effect was more cheerful than sweet.

" I reckon they're ringing the riot call in Mill-vale! " Sewall Ford muttered to his next neighbour when that tremendous bass of January's boomed in the chorus. It drowned Terry's bell-like tenor and Captain Jack's clear baritone, and Charles Pratt gasped at the thought of the lungs that must be back of it.

So did other folks, it seemed. Nearer home it was ringing a riot call. They were on the third song, though, with the fat boy roaring like a wild bull, before some of the fellows suddenly noticed that a lean and grizzled old man was standing at the door of the tent and viewing them with a very unfriendly eye.

" Hello, Mr. Peabody, what can I do for you? " cried Jeff, as the song came to an end.

The old man took a step forward and waved his hand to include the company.

" You can close y'r mouths and give hard-workin' folks a chance to go to sleep! " he said.

CHAPTER VIII

CIGARETTES AND COFFEE SHUT OUT

SOME of the fellows chuckled, but nobody spoke. They were waiting for Jeff, and he did not fail them.

"Your house is pretty nearly a mile away, Mr. Peabody," he said mildly. "You mean to tell me that you can hear our music 'way over there?"

"Music!" the old fellow snarled. "I can hear your tom-fool bellerin' about as plain as if it was in my own front yard!"

"Guess we must have been havin' a good time!" Jeff said to his companions. Then he turned to the old farmer again.

"It's only 8 o'clock," he suggested. "Must have been quarter of 8, when you started to come over here. That past your bedtime?"

"Never you mind whether it is or 'tain't!" growled the visitor. "All is, I ain't goin' to have any such rackety goin's-on anywhere nigh me!"

"Oh, you ain't?"

"No, I ain't!"

"Now, I'll just tell you, Mr. Peabody," Jeff

began in his gentlest voice. "Bedtime here is 9 o'clock. In the evenings, or in the daytime, either, we don't mean to do anything any reasonable man could object to; but we don't feel bound to knuckle to the people who just hate to see other people enjoy themselves. Understand? This camp's on my land. It's utterly impossible that any sounds we might make should disturb anybody at your place — anybody who isn't trying to be disturbed, I mean. So we're going to keep on singing!

"Strike her up, Terry!" Jeff added. And Terry swung into a minstrel song, with six or seven fellows to accompany him, and everybody coming in on a chorus that almost bulged the top of the tent.

The cranky caller was speechless at first, as if the discovery that he couldn't browbeat the boys had shocked him into silence; and though by the time the chorus started he had recovered his voice, it didn't do him any good. He shook his fist and his jaws wagged furiously, but scarcely a word could anybody hear. And when the chorus ended, and Terry, grinning roguishly, waved his hand as a signal to repeat it, old Peabody turned and rushed from the tent.

"Jared's always hunting a fuss with somebody," Jeff remarked calmly, when there was something like silence again. "We'll just be careful to keep off his land — I'll show you my

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western boundary to-morrow — and let him sweat!”

If that was the way it affected the old man, he probably perspired profusely in the course of the next half-hour, for the boys kept on singing. But in consideration for themselves, if not for Jared, Captain Jack summoned them to “come to order” while it was still on the right side of 9 o'clock.

“Fellows in charge of tents, please slack your tent-ropes a little before you turn in,” he said. “The dew will shrink them, you know, and if they're not slacked they're liable to pull out the pegs and let the tent down on top of you.

“And please see that everybody spreads out his sheet of rubber cloth before laying down his mattress. The ground is always more or less damp, and the waterproof is the best thing I know to keep off the dampness.

“January will sound the reveille to-morrow at 6 o'clock. Chapin will be captain of the camp, and he has chosen Elverton and Smith as his assistants. I'm sure we all wish them luck, and stand ready to help them any way we can. Good night, everybody, and pleasant dreams!”

But though Captain Jack had “officially” closed the day of the camp, he did not at once make an end of his own day. He looked to his tent, the slacking of the ropes and the placing of the rubber blankets, and then he quietly struck

outside the little circle of light that marked their canvas colony.

There was nothing on his mind, but he felt nervous and restless, somehow, and he thought he would get out on the road for a stiff little spin of twenty minutes or so. He could return as he came, without disturbing anybody; for earlier in the evening he had put on his moccasins, and with them he sped as lightly as a shadow.

Through the underbrush he went noiselessly; around to the wood-road; thence to the highway. But he had not taken many strides on the main road before he scented an odour that seemed strangely out of place here, and, rounding a turn swiftly, he came upon Charles Pratt — smoking a cigarette.

The Roxbridge boy had the grace to be ashamed. He tried to slip it out of sight. Captain Jack smiled.

“ I’ll pretend I didn’t see that, Charles, if you’ll never light another!” he said. But right there Pratt made a mistake. Since Lorimer took it so quietly, he thought there was a chance to argue.

“ Of course you fellows who don’t smoke are not giving up anything when you promise not to smoke,” he muttered. “ But if I smoke at home I don’t know any reason why I shouldn’t do it in camp; do you? ”

“ That’s easily answered. You shouldn’t smoke

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at home. You have still less right to smoke in a training camp, such as this practically is."

"Oh, yes, it's easy to talk about leaving off!" Pratt grumbled.

"And a hard thing to do, you think? I don't doubt that. But we had a clear understanding, you remember, — no tobacco to be brought here, — and I must hold you to it."

"Don't see why you're so down on cigarettes!" was Pratt's next feeble attempt at defence.

"Nonsense, Charles! You do see! If you'd be frank about it, you'd put up a better argument against them than I could. But that isn't the point at present. We campers have agreed not to do certain things, and as gentlemen we must keep our word with each other. Of course you realize that, and you're sorry for making this break and determined not to repeat it."

"All right." Pratt's voice was pretty sour, but Lorimer believed in trusting everybody up to the last minute, and he put out his hand as if the matter was settled.

"Good boy!" he cried. "What say, now, if we go back and turn in? January will be blowing his horn at 6 sharp, and if it's a fine morning and he feels restless, he may turn loose before that!"

"See here, Charles," he added seriously, when they had taken a few steps toward camp, "don't get the idea I like to preach! I have my own

weaknesses to fight — for one thing, the worst temper that ever was stowed inside a fellow's skin — and I'm holding on to myself with both hands all the time. I know how hard it is to keep straight. I'm not setting myself an inch above other fellows. And if I can help you any, sing out! ”

“ All right,” Pratt said once more. How much this meant, whether it would be all right or not, Jack couldn't tell. That was for time to show.

But before anything more had a chance to happen in that quarter, the young Van Dusen came forward with a pet habit to be knocked on the head. And this was the way of it:

January's horn roused the camp to a fine morning, and Captain Jack put the Van Dusen boy through a deep-breathing exercise, led him a sprint to the river, and gave him a lesson in swimming. Then they came back to the first meal under Will Chapin's direction, and the young fellow seated himself and stared ravenously over the table.

“ What else have you, please? ” he said to Archie Smith, who was acting as one of the waiters.

“ We're not cooking anything much for breakfast, except two cereal foods, an oatmeal and a wheat,” Archie answered. “ Give you boiled eggs or buttered toast, though.”

“ Well, boiled eggs and toast and coffee, please.”

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Archie smiled. "No coffee or tea in the camp," he said.

"Coffee is half my breakfast!" the boy growled discontentedly.

"Guess you'll have to get along with the other half, then," Archie chuckled.

But young Van Dusen wouldn't submit to that without a struggle. He dropped his paper napkin and made his way along the table to Captain Jack, who was beginning his breakfast with an orange, which he meant to follow with a saucer of cereal and cream and a slice of buttered toast.

"Say, Mr. Lorimer, why can't I have coffee for breakfast, as I've always had?" he demanded.

"For the same reason that you can't have iced tea and cigarettes at luncheon, a cocktail before dinner, a cigar after dinner, and a toddy to go to bed on," Captain Jack answered smilingly. "Because you don't need any of them and they'll do you harm."

"My father takes all those things, when he feels like it!"

"I'm not criticizing your father, Will, — and when you get to his age I'll agree not to interfere with you," Jack added with another smile. "Possibly a man of sixty needs a stimulant. A growing boy doesn't. Glance around the table. Think we look as though we'd suffered by avoiding such things?"

In the presence of those sturdy figures, the

boy couldn't say yes. He wanted to look like that !

" We'll talk this all over by and by, Will," Captain Jack said. " Meantime, if you've been accustomed to drink and feel as if you couldn't get your food down without it, you might breakfast on a pint of milk and two bananas. Mind, though, milk is food, and you want to chew it!

" Yes," he went on, as the boy laughed, " I mean that. Don't gulp your milk. Take a little at a time; and rinse it around your mouth a second before you swallow it. I suspect you've got to be taught to eat, my son! Your father'll laugh, won't he, if you tell him that? He'll understand, though, when he sees you growing — up and down and sideways! "

That pleasing picture put the thought of coffee out of the boy's mind. He went back to his seat and cheerfully began to eat milk.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE LAWN - PARTY, AND AFTERWARD

ONE reason why Captain Jack and his comrades welcomed Jeff Bussey's proposition to camp at Four Corners, was that through Jeff they had made many friends in the town. During the previous football season, Millvale High had played the Four Corners "Indians," and since then Harry Lee, the captain of the team, had visited Millvale several times, as Lorimer's guest, and between the country boys who were nothing like "jays" and the city boys who had nothing in common with "toughs," there was very cordial good-will.

It was Harry Lee's sister, Josie, who was giving the lawn-party to the campers; and, every time he looked at her or talked to her, Captain Jack felt like admitting that, if there had been no May Roxton in Millvale, he would have liked to live at Four Corners.

"Yes, Jo's a fine girl, if I do say it," Harry responded when Lorimer laughingly hinted as much. "You just come over here, though, and let me introduce you to another, Nan Knowlton.

We're in luck that there isn't a crowd around, I tell you! "

Miss Knowlton was a vivid little brunette, as graceful as a flower and as gay as a bird, and Lorimer found it easy to understand his friend's admiration for her.

" And she's no doll, either, if she is a little one! " Harry found a chance to whisper. " I don't believe there's a better fencer in this end of the State—and you just ought to see her handle some of her father's blooded horses! By jove, she takes out brutes that I wouldn't want to drive! "

" She's a very charming girl, Harry," Captain Jack said in all sincerity.

" Oh, we've got a few of 'em. I'll have to admit that Millvale rather beats us for quantity. But then, Millvale's a bigger place! " They both laughed.

" Have to introduce Terry and Ned Harriott," Lorimer suggested. " Rose Ahearn and Clare Bell are our star fencers, you know, so their friends Terry and Ned have a second-hand knowledge of the art.

" But, speaking of introductions," Lorimer went on, " you must find me a boy of eleven or twelve to do the honours for Will Van Dusen, the young fellow I'm — "

" Oh, my brother Ralph has already connected with him. They're having a party without any

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lawn in it. They were in the barn, doing stunts over the beams, the last I knew. May as well let 'em alone. They're as safe there as they would be anywhere. A fellow of that age is bound to risk his life about once an hour, wherever you leave him."

They summoned Terry and Ned and put them under the spell of the dark-eyed girl who queened it over Harry, and then they walked from group to group, reviving old and making new friendships. Finally as Josie Lee joined them, they stopped to watch a half-dozen couples who were waltzing to January Jones's "music."

"I see January's training like a major," Harry said soberly, with a wink aside to Captain Jack. "Good deal thinner than he was. Aren't you, January?"

"Ho yus, thank ye, sir, Hi ham, sir!" January responded gayly. He held out the long tin whistle he used for camp calls, and with which he had been "playing" for the dancers.

"See 'ere!" he went on. "Three or four months ago, Hi couldn't shove this hinside me waistband without 'urting meself — but when Hi stick it there now it drops right down me pants leg!"

Josie turned her head to hide a smile.

"Just wait till next week — till you see Lou Mains put January through some stunts!" Captain Jack told her. "If you don't say there's a

coming athlete, I miss my guess!" The fat boy coloured high with pride.

"Mains will join you next week, then?" Harry said. "That's good news! But where's Tom Bell? And Phil Kavanagh's at work, you say? Mighty glad Mains is coming, anyway!"

"Yes, Lou promised to get down for two or three days at least. There's no reason I can see why he shouldn't give his blessed law books a rest and stay a week, but I don't know who can persuade him to do it — unless Miss Josie takes a hand! As for Tom, he had to go to New York; and Phil's in business, on the way to make his fortune, I hope!

"Hello, Will! What have you been up to?" he added suddenly, as Will Van Dusen approached with Ralph Lee, the younger brother. "I can see you boys have been in mischief. Better confess!"

It was Ralph who answered.

"No, sir-ree, no mischief about it!" he cried. "Will did a big thing! Fell off a beam — caught a ladder as he went down — stopped himself, and hung by his hands till he could get his feet on the rungs! I wouldn't want to try that, you bet!"

"Let me see your hands, Will," Josie interrupted. "Oh, you poor boy! You scraped your wrists dreadfully, didn't you? Now you must come in with me and let me tie them up — else I won't give you and Ralph any ice-cream!"

"Quite a stunt for a small boy," Harry sug-

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gested, as his sister led Will away, her arm across his shoulder.

"He's a rather remarkable boy," was Captain Jack's answer. "Quick as a flash. Rather surprises me, though, that he should have the strength to check himself like that, and then hold on."

"Oh, he's pretty strong," young Ralph commented, shaking his head wisely. "He says he's a heap stronger than he was when he went into training."

Naturally the older fellows laughed. The Van Dusen boy had been "in training," partial at that, for just about a week!

"Speaking about training, it's a pretty clean-cut crowd, Harry," Captain Jack suggested, as his eyes wandered thoughtfully over the lawn.

"That's what it is! And it's training that has made it so! I haven't any doubt your club and gym are making straight, square fellows out of fellows that might have been hoodlums — and I know, when we started in to brace ourselves, a lot of us were on the point of turning into regular country slouches. It takes time and work to get the stoop out of your shoulders and the kinks out of your muscles, and then keep clean inside and out; but it's worth it! And when a fellow's sound physically, he's pretty sure to be a fellow you can count on — one that won't go back on you or serve you a dirty trick!"

That was pretty nearly Lorimer's own idea. And it was mainly because the trouble-makers were not "sound physically" — which meant in this case that their nerves and their imaginations were not under control — that he dealt charitably and quietly with a little trouble that arose that same evening.

The lawn-party, a triumphant success, had been three hours over. Supper was over, too, and Horace White had been drawn as captain for next day and had named Sewall Ford and Will Reed as his assistants. Two or three of the fellows were writing letters, as many more were reading, and the others were lying about in little groups discussing the events of the afternoon and making plans for the morrow — when Captain Jack, taking one of his tours around camp, came suddenly on Charles Pratt and Will Van Dusen, with their heads together in a way that foreboded mischief.

"Hello, boys, anything wrong?" he said, throwing himself down, uninvited, on the ground beside them. There was a moment of silence.

"The fact is, we were talking of going home in the morning," Will Van Dusen said sourly.

"Yes? What's the trouble?"

"Well, I think if I'm not on the inside I might as well be on the outside!" was the boy's excited answer. "When you fellows started back from the lawn-party, you wouldn't let me come with you!"

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Captain Jack smiled into his angry eyes.

"You knew how we came back," Lorimer answered. "It's two miles and a little more from Lee's to the head of the wood-road, and eighteen of us ran — raced. I told Sandy Carr to stay behind because he twisted his ankle on the way over, and I wouldn't have you and Pratt and January join us because the pace would have been too hot for you.

"To narrow it down to you, a two-mile run on a hot afternoon might do you serious harm, and at the present time I wouldn't let you take it. It would be just about as absurd and dangerous for you to try to imitate us who have been in training for years, as it would be for your father's office boy to undertake to run his business."

Van Dusen didn't say anything, but Pratt chuckled. Captain Jack turned to him.

"What's your grievance, Charles?" he asked.

"Well — I've been rather out of it, as you might say — here, and at the lawn-party — there especially," Pratt answered in a hesitating way. "It makes things pretty slow, you know, and — well, not what I've been used to!"

This was the kind of poor excuse that is sometimes better than none — but not much. Of course there was a lot behind, the stoppage of his cigarettes, for instance. Yet Lorimer took it with perfect gravity, as though it was a real reason.

"You're like Will," was his smiling rejoinder. "You're out of it, or feel so, because you're not in training — that is, you're tackling new experiences. As for the lawn-party, though, you made a hit. I didn't mean to speak of it, just yet, but I was told to bring you two, nobody else, over to Lee's to tea, day after to-morrow."

He did not say that he had asked for the invitation, on their account, and, as they got it, it was good medicine. Pratt's face flushed with delight.

"Why, is that so?" he said. "That's bully!" Van Dusen was almost as much pleased.

"You fellows will feel better in the morning," Lorimer added lightly. "Night, away from home, is a lonesome time. Of course you can't expect to get much fun out of anything unless you give yourselves a chance to get used to it. Just wait a few days, till you begin to brace physically and get acquainted with Lee's and our own crowd, and nobody could drive you away!"

But, though Captain Jack didn't anticipate anything of the kind, it was not impossible that somebody would try!

CHAPTER X

THE RACKETY ROAD UP THE LEDGE

KNOWING Horace White so well as he did, the restless energy of him, his anxiety to be always undertaking some new thing, Lorimer looked forward with interest to the day of his reign. That would be only the third day of the camp and most of the fellows had hardly found out yet "where they were at." But it was pretty safe to conclude that Horace had learned his ground well enough to be reminded of some scheme which he would suggest before the day was over.

"And I hope," Jack said to himself, "that it's a good big scheme, something that will keep everybody jumping for a few days and leave me no time or occasion to find fault with anybody!" When he recalled the way he had had to hand out instruction and advice to Pratt, Van Dusen and others, he gritted his teeth; for, like every other healthy-minded fellow, he didn't relish the idea of "preaching," and didn't want to figure as one who sets himself up above others.

He had his wish. Horace was ready with the

scheme, and offered it at the breakfast-table, even before he ate his own breakfast.

"Say, fellows," he began excitedly, "why can't we do something useful while we're here, something for Jeff to remember us by?"

Everybody nodded, smiled and showed willingness to listen.

"There's this big ledge," Horace went on, "three hundred feet or so high, beautiful outlook from it, but it's mighty hard to scramble up, you know, and on the opposite side it's a sheer drop. Well, why shouldn't we clear a winding path wide enough for two? Then we can set up a flag-pole at the top, and fly our flag while we stay here!"

Jeff grinned into his plate. The notion that a path up the ledge, a piece of private property where nobody ever wanted to go, would be "useful," amused him immensely. However, if the boys thought they could get some fun out of it, it would be all right. He waited cheerfully to hear from others.

"'Tis in my mind that if we want to do something really useful, we might give Uncle Isaiah Bussey and the hired men a lift at their hoeing," Terry commented with a grin. "Oh, but I'm not denying that carrying rocks and cutting brush is good exercise, Horace! Let Jeff sign a written agreement that he won't prosecute me for trespass, and I'm game to tackle the ledge."

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"Horace's scheme will give us good practice in engineering and road-building," Jack suggested quietly. "Jeff might not use his new road very often, but it would be valuable to him because his friends built it."

"Yes, and we'd have something to tinker at — something to do besides just sport around," Horace said eagerly. "Work that's a different kind of fun, you know."

"Lay out your road, Horace, and choose your first gang of builders," Ned Harriott cried. "Say you make the working day eight hours, put four or five men in a gang, and have each of the four gangs work two hours a day. That leaves everybody plenty of time for milder amusements."

"Say, who's doing this, you or me?" growled White. But when it came to the point of "doing this," it was Ned's plan that was adopted with very few changes, and Ned was honoured with the foremanship of the first gang which, under Horace's direction, began the road-building that very afternoon.

By the straightest way to the top — a way that it would have been almost impossible to climb — the ledge was, as Horace had said, almost three hundred feet high. The winding path that he marked out would be about one hundred and fifty yards in length.

For a great part of the way a hatchet, a sickle and a rake were the only tools that would be

needed. Small stones could be laid at the side of the path. Larger stones, that would not look as though they belonged there, could be carried to the foot of the ledge, and dropped into one of the clefts.

But there were two places where, as planned by Horace, the new path would lead up to enormous boulders; and, when they saw that, the fellows tapped their foreheads and grinned at him significantly.

"Poor boy! So young and so foolish!" said Terry.

"When you come to these you do a running high jump. Eh, Horace?" suggested Elverton.

"Wrong! There'll be several pairs of wings stored here in a little closet under the edge of the rock — won't there, Horace?" Chapin asked.

"Oh, you fellows are smart!" White growled. "On each side of this rock is the only patch of mountain laurel I've seen anywhere around. What's the matter with saving that, hey? And flanking that upper rock are half a dozen outcrops, natural shelves, large enough to stand or sit or lie down on — just the stopping-places there ought to be, half-way up in a climb like this!"

"Right, Horace," agreed Jack. "But how are you going to get the path over the rocks?"

"Well, why not drill 'em and blast 'em?"

"Blast 'em! So say I!" Janvrin put in. "Any

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of you fellows ever held a drill? Well, I have. I call it pretty tame amusement!"

"You can take the first turn, Matt, since you know how, and show the other fellows," chuckled White.

"Well, seeing it's you — bring on your tools!" But here White had to admit that he was unprovided.

"I got a can of blasting powder, though, when I went to the store this morning," he added proudly.

"Guess Uncle Isaiah's got drills and sledges," Jeff suggested. "I'll take a run over and see. Strikes me you better do your blasting first of anything, if you're going to do it at all. Because, if you don't, the path below the rocks you've blasted will have to be cleared out twice."

"That's so, Jeff! Skip along and get the drills, will you?"

Horace was full of business, now, and though the other fellows did not share his excitement, they were interested, and, both to please him and for the sake of the game, ready and willing to help. To the impatience of some, it seemed a long time, though actually it was a short one, before Jeff returned with a half-dozen drills and a sledge.

A dozen fellows climbed to the upper rock and Matt sat down at the point Horace indicated and took the drill between his palms, prepared

to give it a turn in the hole it made, after every blow.

"You going to strike, Horace?" he asked. "Well, you remember, you and me and the sledge and the drill are alone in the world, and all you've got to think of is hitting that drill on the head and not letting the hammer slip!"

The other fellows backed off to a safe distance, perching in the easiest attitudes they could upon the almost perpendicular face of the ledge, and Horace began.

To swing a sledge is no such difficult accomplishment, provided one has the strength to handle the tool, and Horace soon mastered it and relieved Matt of the fear of losing a hand or a wrist. Holding the drill is really quite as much of an art, but with careful watching and a little practice the fellows "got the hang" of that; and though Horace wanted to keep on and do it all, the others insisted on taking their turn, and the drill ate fast into the rock.

"Supper time," said Horace at length, pausing in his second turn to wipe his forehead.

"Let's load her up and touch her off before we quit!" somebody cried.

"Well, what say? If the rest of you want to do it, you be swabbing out the hole and I'll climb down and get the powder and fuse."

"Go on," nodded Jack. He was as curious as the rest, to see what that single charge would lift.

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"Know how to load, Horace?" Jeff asked, as their companion scrambled back with his sinister armful.

"No, Matt's going to do that. I'll touch her off. Rest of you better be hunting cover." And a moment later they began to edge away toward the scant clusters of shrubbery.

"There's your crank neighbour, the old fellow who doesn't like music, snooping around the tents," called Will Chapin to Jeff, as he chanced to look below. "Say, he's dressed up. Got his plug hat and all the fixin's. What say if we give him a song?"

Old Jared Peabody was rather an awe-inspiring spectacle, even as seen from a distance. He wore his Sunday clothes, and the ancient bell-top beaver that crowned his lanky form made him look about nine feet high. Jeff grinned, and yet he felt sour, for he knew what all this extra display meant.

"He's come hunting trouble," he muttered. "Wonder what we've been doing — or haven't been doing — now?"

There was no one in the tents. Old Jared found that out, after a little prowling around. He discovered, too, that the fellows were up on the ledge; and, standing at the foot, he began gesticulating fiercely.

"Ready?" cried Horace at that moment. "Lie close! Here she goes!" He lit the fuse and bounded toward the refuge he had chosen.

A moment of expectation, and then —

Crash! Bang! It seemed at first that the ledge itself had gone into the air. But when the fellows got their heads clear and ran toward their rock, they found that the blast had simply done the work they hoped. A second one, a foot lower, would open the path.

“ Good engineering! ” cried Jack.

“ Say, look below there! ” somebody cried.

It was old Jared at whom he pointed. Not standing proudly and gesturing furiously, was old Jared, now. He was sitting, facing the ledge, where the shock had evidently thrown him. But his eyes were turned where theirs followed — to the bell-top beaver, that had been swept off his head by a flying splinter of rock, and pinned half-way up the side of the nearest tent.

CHAPTER XI

SMOKE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

OLD Jared couldn't tell, at first, what he had come after. He goggled and whimpered and rubbed his head like a man completely upset. But finally it turned out that he wanted to protest against being "spied on" from the top of the ledge!

"You're trespassin', same as, when you go up there to look over my place," he complained. "You ain't got any right, nuther, to slambang around and throw rocks on people and bust their property! You stay down from there and keep still, or I'll — I'll prosecute ye!"

It was charitable to conclude that the old man had been dazed by the fright and didn't really know what he was saying. They let him sputter, listened respectfully and made no answer, and after awhile he pulled the splinter of rock out of his hat, put the rock carefully in his pocket and set the hat on his head, and stalked out of camp.

"Crazy!" Terry declared. "Sure any man must be who doesn't admire the engineering of Mr. Horace White, P. M., R. B."

"Hey? What's that?" Horace yelled.

"P. M. for Path-Maker, R. B. for Rock-Buster," Terry answered calmly. "'Tis you should be proud of the degrees I've conferred upon you! They're worth more than many a M. A., Master of Arts, — because they're true!"

"See here, fellows, I think we ought to give Horace a fair chance at this," Lorimer suggested. "Why not appoint him camp captain for to-morrow again? We can give him extra help with the cooking and chores and let him 'sling' himself on his road and get the full credit of it."

"Good work! Hooray!" yelled Sewall Ford, White's chum. But he was not alone in his approval. Everybody else applauded, and Horace's feelings were not hurt when Terry looked over and grinned at him, and remarked:

"'Tis queer, though, that a lad of his natural cleverness should be such a poisonous cook!"

Then Horace rose to the emergency.

"See here, Terry," he called across the table, "you'll have charge of three meals to-morrow! Understand?" And Terry fell off his camp-chair, like one stricken, and rolled on the ground, groaning heavily.

There seemed some danger, that night, that Horace would get up in his sleep and go to road-building. He and Sewall spent most of the evening climbing around the ledge, and came down

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unwillingly to make the 9 o'clock "round-up." However, they agreed to rise early and start work.

"Because there's wet weather coming," Horace said. "I can smell it! Don't believe it'll rain to-night or to-morrow, but it'll be damp and muggy, and we ought to get through while it's easy to move lively."

And there was no chance to complain of his liveliness next day, though it was a "sticky" atmosphere that made one want to strip and sit in the river. The fellows wouldn't go back on him, and they clung to the drilling and blasting and clearing manfully; but Horace did more than anybody else. Nearing the tents in the evening, on their return from tea at the Lees, Captain Jack and Pratt and Van Dusen saw a light away up on the ledge.

"He's at it yet!" Pratt muttered. And when they got into camp it proved that Horace had indeed been working overtime.

"Settle down, now, for the night!" Lorimer said with a laugh. White smiled in a shame-faced way. But that gigantic enterprise of engineering lay heavily on his mind. When he sat down, he remembered heaps of things he wanted to do: and after an hour of restlessness he nudged Ford, and they slipped out of camp and up the ledge again.

They took no lantern, and they went softly and spoke in whispers. The fellows would poke

fun if they were found up there! By this time they knew the place pretty well, and they were more than half-way to the top when Horace halted and laid his hand on a flat rock.

"Remember this, Sewall?" he whispered. "Bully seat, eh? Natural back and all. I've been thinking we might carry the road on each side of it, eh? Sort of enclose it, you know, and show that we thought it was precious!"

But to this Sewall made a reply that didn't fit at all.

"Say," he murmured, "I smell tobacco!"

"Nonsense!"

"Well, I do! And I'm going to find out what it means! Easy, now!"

Stealthily as two Indians, they crept up the ledge, — up, up, almost to the top. Trailing the odour, heavy in the damp air, silently they swung around the boulder — to the source of it.

"Oh, don't mind us, Pratt!" Horace said sarcastically. "Enjoy yourself! Touch up another coffin-nail!"

The smoker, Charles Pratt, tried to act as if he was indifferent and quite at ease. But he wriggled uneasily when the fellows seated themselves, one on each side of him.

"Been up to this ever since you came to camp, Pratt?" Horace asked.

"Ye— No, I mean!"

"Well, as Terry would say, I guess you're

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mean enough for anything. You know the rules? ”

Pratt nodded. His mind reverted uncomfortably to that interview, only three days before, when Lorimer had reminded him of them.

“ S’pose we ought to split on you,” Horace went on, half to himself. “ But I hate to worry Captain Jack, since he feels sort of responsible for you — and I hate to sneak, even for the sake of discipline. I’ve a mighty good mind to settle this thing myself!

“ See here,” he added suddenly and sternly, “ which would you rather do, have me tell Captain Jack, or you take a licking and promise to quit? ”

There was not much light from moon or stars, that night, but they could see poor Pratt’s face turn slowly green.

“ I’ll t-t-take the licking!” he stammered desperately. And the avengers nodded approval.

“ That’s man-fashion, so far,” Sewall said. “ Lorimer’s used you mighty white, Pratt, and you want him to think you’ve been square with him.”

“ But don’t make any mistake, Pratt,” Horace added grimly. “ It’ll be a peach of a licking! Cigarettes will never taste good to you when you think of it! And — say, Sewall! ”

“ Yes.”

“ If he ever relapses, as the doctors say, smokes

another, you'll lick him. We'll take turns, till we knock the habit out of his system. How's that? "

" That's right! "

" Give me all the cigarettes you've got," White demanded abruptly. Pratt handed over a long box almost full.

" Any more down in the camp? "

" No."

White mounted a few yards and pitched the box from the summit of the ledge. When he came back he carried a few sprigs of sweet fern.

" Crush that in your hands," he said. " Take the smell off. Remember, that licking is due to-morrow morning after breakfast. Don't try to dodge! I'd chase you home to Roxbridge, sooner'n miss giving it to you!

" What say, now, if we go down? " he added.

The three came into camp, together, and Captain Jack smiled happily to see them thus. White and Ford were not among his closest friends, they had traits he didn't like at all, and yet they had many fine qualities, and association with them would be likely to do Pratt good. That was the way he sized up the situation. What Pratt thought of it, Pratt alone could tell!

But now Horace had something else on his mind besides the road-building — which was enough for one boy — and thinking about these things he hurried into bed to brace himself for

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a busy day. When in the middle of the night a wind arose, he didn't know it. No thought of duty left undone oppressed his slumbers. Yet presently the camp was roused by the roaring of him and his tent-mates, sounds that suggested nightmare or something worse.

"'Tis Horace dreaming that his road has tipped up and turned over," Terry muttered sleepily.

Lorimer stuck his head through the tent-flap, and drew back chuckling.

"Volunteers for a rescue-party wanted," he said as he pushed his feet into his slippers. "Guess Horace forgot to slack his tent-ropes or drive in his pegs, and this damp weather has drawn the pegs out of the ground. The tent's blown down on 'em."

CHAPTER XII

IN TIME FOR THE FORMAL OPENING

It was rather unfortunate that Josie Lee was driving a fresh horse that day she met her brother at the Junction. Lou Mains, for whom Captain Jack and Jeff were waiting with another team, came in on the same train with Harry. But there was no chance for an introduction, for the Lee horse fairly turned somersaults when he heard the engine, and Harry sprinted across the platform, jumped into the light wagon, and, taking the reins, sent the brute away.

Lou got one good look at Josie, however. He stared after the vanishing turnout as if that wasn't nearly enough.

"By George!" he muttered; and Lorimer and Bussey saw and heard, and winked at each other joyfully. They had felt all along that if there was anybody at Four Corners who could persuade Lou to stay longer than the two days he had planned for, Josie Lee was that individual.

It was Tuesday, and the Millvale crowd had been in camp in Bussey's Woods a week. On the whole, it had been a delightful week, with just

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one day of damp weather, and no very unpleasant episode, unless one might count as such Pratt's return to cigarettes and the "licking" with which White punished it. Yet that was all in the family, so to speak. Nobody but White and Ford and Pratt himself knew where the Roxbridge boy got the black eye he displayed on a certain morning; nobody asked questions; and the beauty of it was that — for the time, anyway — it did really break Pratt from cigarettes.

Of course Mains heard nothing about all this. It was the agreeable things that Jack and Jeff talked about; and there were so many to relate, and the drive from the Junction was so enjoyable, that the visitor said, at length:

"Glad I happened over! Wish I'd been here all along!"

"Happened!" Jeff repeated. Mains smiled at the tone.

"Just so," he answered. "Had the luck to get through a stint I set myself. Couldn't have spared the time if I hadn't got through."

"Guess you'll spare the time to stay awhile, now you are here," Jeff said, shaking his head wisely. But Captain Jack wouldn't press that point, just at present. He thought it would be safe to leave things to Fate — and Josie Lee.

"Anyway, you're just in season to help us open Horace White's road up the ledge," he

suggested. "A worker like you ought to sympathize with Horace. He's hung to his job like a dog to a bone, and if we'd paid him for overtime he'd have all the money in the crowd!"

They were at the place where the wood-road joined the highway, and Jeff tied his horse in a shady spot and noiselessly led his friends to a corner that commanded the camp and the ledge at its back.

"See it?" he chuckled. "See Horace's path? 'Bout as many crooks and turns as there are on the road to ruin, ain't there? Well, it's a good, easy road, just the same, and you want to climb up it and pat Horace on the back!"

But that would have to be postponed till later. For several of the fellows got their eyes on Mains at that moment, and they yelled for the others, and it was half an hour before he was free to do anything besides shake hands and give and take the news of Millvale and the camp.

"Where's January?" he asked at length. Everybody laughed.

"Farming, probably," Captain Jack answered.

"Eh?"

"He and Uncle Isaiah have sort o' taken a shine to each other," Jeff explained. "Like to hear each other talk, ye know. Chances are, if uncle's hoein' to-day, January's slamming 'round with another hoe in the next row to him, and their tongues are both goin' a plaguy sight

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faster'n their hoes are. He'll be here in time for Horace's show, or — ”

“ What say if I go get him? ” Pratt smilingly interrupted. “ Won't that be the safest way? ”

“ Thank you, Charles, I don't know but it would be,” said Lorimer. “ If you feel like taking the walk — ”

“ No, I'll make it a run,” Pratt responded smilingly; and even as he spoke he was off. Mains looked after him with a pleased expression.

“ Improved already,” he muttered to Lorimer. “ So's young Van Dusen. Great brace they've made in the last week or so! ” And Captain Jack nodded his agreement.

“ If Rob Marr and the rest of the right crowd in Roxbridge will get in touch with Pratt and stand ready to give him a little lift when he needs it, he'll soon be able to hold his end up pretty well,” he answered. “ And if old Van Dusen will just keep his hands off young Van Dusen, let him develop naturally and as he wants to, I'll back him for another winner. They have their faults, like other fellows, but there's good stuff in both of them.

“ How's that, Horace? ” he asked as White came up. “ I've been telling Lou that I think Pratt is worth working with, and I'd like your judgment, since you've had more to do with him than anybody else.”

He said it innocently, not knowing all that

White — and his fist — had had to do; and the other answered with perfect seriousness.

“ I think Pratt’s going to shape up all right,” he said. “ We’ve got him now where he really wants to improve, and that’s a mighty good sign.

“ Say, when does this speechmaking foolishness happen? ” he added, with a sheepish grin. “ Wish you fellows would hurry up and get the speeches off your stomachs! I want to go over to the postoffice.”

“ There aren’t going to be any speeches except yours and Jeff’s — your speech presenting the road and his of acceptance.”

“ Mine? Not much!” cried Horace, backing off in alarm. “ You’ve got to do that! Say, unless you agree, I’ll skip out right now! ”

Lorimer thought it over a minute. On the whole, he concluded, it might be a good idea to do the talking, since if Horace had to do it he would never claim the credit to which he was entitled. So when Pratt returned with January, and the crowd had solemnly paraded, two by two, up the new road to the top of the ledge, Lorimer told in brief, graceful terms, how White had suggested the scheme, planned the road, directed the construction, and done the work of two or three.

“ We offer the road to our friend Jeff Bussey,” he said, “ as a souvenir of a camping party made at home here by his generous hospitality, and we suggest that he call it the White Way.”

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"So I will!" Jeff answered promptly. "This is the White Way. White for the feller that hatched the idea and for all the other white fellers that worked on it! There, now! That's all the speech I've got!"

"Aren't you going to hoist the flag?" Horace asked, in a disappointed tone. His last achievement had been to drill a hole in the top of the ledge and set up a flagstaff, and he was prouder of that than of any other part of the performance.

"Not much! You're going to!" was Jeff's reply. And he and Captain Jack escorted White forward and placed the halyards in his hands, while January started in on his own hook to lead the cheering.

"'Ooroar for 'Orace White!" he began.

"'Ooroar for Jeff Bussey!" came next.

"'Ooroar for the White helephant!" was the third call for cheers.

He meant to say something very different, of course — the White elevator, perhaps. The other word had somehow caught on his tongue, in the curious way words sometimes do.

And yet, though the fellows laughed instead of cheering, and poked a lot of fun at him, it seemed to Captain Jack a minute later that January was a prophet and had sized up the situation; for all of a sudden Will Van Dusen came over and pointed toward the lower end of the path.

"There's father, down in the camp!" Will said.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LOAD OF THE WHITE ELEPHANT

As Captain Jack had said to Mains, the trouble with the elder Van Dusen would be to make him keep his hands off. He was so anxious to help that he was liable to hinder, and would have to be watched continually to prevent him from killing somebody with kindness.

But the gleam of gratification that shone in his eyes as he watched his son running down the ledge was not lost upon Captain Jack. Evidently Van Dusen realized that things were "going right;" and Lorimer hardened his heart to keep them so, even at the cost of forcible language.

There was no need of that at first, though, for the visitor was smiling of countenance and almost jovial in manner, and he shook Lorimer's hand as if he would never let go.

"The young man is looking well," Van Dusen said. "In fact" — he settled his eyeglasses more firmly and glanced at the fellows on the ledge — "roughing it seems to agree with everybody.

"You're enjoying yourself, Will?" he added.

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"Don't miss anything you have at home? No particular hardship that's too much for you?"

"Oh, I'm having a bully time," was the boy's answer.

"I left the auto out beyond," Mr. Van Dusen resumed. "I brought some — er — a few things that I thought might prove a — er — palatable addition to your camp menu. Shall I tell the chauffeur to unload the packages?" He kept an anxious eye on Captain Jack and, though Lorimer listened with a smile, that didn't seem to give the millionaire much comfort.

"If it's anything as serviceable as the wooden plates you so thoughtfully sent us, I'd say yes at once," was the leader's reply. "We've blessed your name for those, three times a day. But we're not receiving gifts of luxuries and dainties, you know, sir. They don't harmonize with a camp, and they couldn't be eaten by fellows who are in training.

"Suppose you give me an idea of what you brought, sir?" he suggested.

"Come out to the auto."

Slowly and rather sadly Van Dusen led the way over the wood-road and out to the highway, and nervously named the contents of the cases and packages that filled all the spare space in the big car.

He must have raided a fancy grocery. There was everything in the assortment of expensive

delicacies from pâté de foie gras to chocolate creams. But there was little or nothing that Captain Jack would have eaten himself or allowed to a would-be athlete, and as he looked over the mess January's phrase came into his mind and seemed to fit the auto and its load. A white elephant — that was what Van Dusen's touring-car was — and yet it would have to be taken care of somehow!

"This is very generous of you, Mr. Van Dusen," he said, "but I don't see how we can use anything except the nuts and fruit. Pâté and truffles and foods of that kind are about as contrary to our principles as champagne and cigars would be. Pickles are almost poisonous to a boy of Will's build and temperament, and, though he needs sugar, I'd rather give it to him in some safer form than candy. We appreciate it all, your thought of us, and the delicacies you've brought us, but, as I said before, the nuts and fruit will be all I dare to keep."

"All right. Take these two baskets into the camp, Harris, and leave the rest of the stuff where it is," Van Dusen said to the chauffeur. Like every successful man he could throw off and forget a thing the minute it was settled, and now he turned to his son, with another thought already in his mind.

"If you want to take some of your friends for an hour's spin, Will, you may do so," he said.

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"Meanwhile I'll look over the camp and talk with Mr. Lorimer."

Ten minutes later an odd assortment — Terry, Pratt, Harriott and Will Van Dusen — bowed away in the auto, and Captain Jack led its owner through the camp, and finally, by White's new road, up to the top of the ledge.

"What do you think of my son?" was Van Dusen's first question when they were alone.

"He's a fine boy, sir," Captain Jack replied. "Full of energy and ambition, pretty good constitution to build upon, and intelligent enough to understand and carry out instructions. Principal difficulty will be to keep him from trying to do too much, go ahead too fast. But that'll be my business — provided you trust me with his training. I rely on you and his mother not to interfere."

"Eh? What? How's that?"

Captain Jack smiled, but he looked the older man straight in the eye.

"I mean that if Will does anything or objects to do anything, and you don't understand, I don't want you to fuss or argue with him about it, but let me know. For example, when he goes home he'll probably eat different food, go to bed and get up earlier, and make other changes in his habits. All these changes will be for his good. If any of them puzzle you, bring your questions

to me, and I'll tell you why I advised him to do so-and-so. That's fair, isn't it? "

" Er — yes — it appears to be," was the father's cautious answer. " Of course we are prepared to sustain you in all beneficial undertakings — "

" And I must be the judge of what are beneficial," Captain Jack interrupted. Mr. Van Dusen laughed.

" Very well," he said. " You're an obstinate, up-and-down rascal, but I fancy you know what you're talking about; and I like to see a lad stick up for his rights! "

In the course of the next hour he heard many things that puzzled him. There were no " frills " on this camp, either of clothing or diet, and Van Dusen could hardly understand how boys who came from homes where they had everything they wanted could enjoy going without things as they did here. But that they were enjoying themselves and gaining health and strength he could not doubt. His own son vouched for it.

Well ballasted with new ideas, Mr. Van Dusen went away at length, and Lorimer turned to greet Harry Lee, a more frequent visitor who was always welcome.

" One goes and another comes," Lee said, smilingly. " But everybody will be travelling, perhaps, day after to-morrow. What do I mean by that? Well, I've already fixed it up with Terry

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and Mains to take the crowd, as many as want to go, to the fair at Hill Village."

"Have you? Thursday, eh? What about the fair? And where is Hill Village?"

"Eight or ten miles west of here. The fair is given by an agricultural society that covers all the towns in this region. Fair comes so early in the season that there's not much doing elsewhere for fakirs and side-show men, and they're on hand in regiments. Pretty lively times there, generally. You can see about everything you'd find at any such show, from an educated pig to a balloon ascension."

"Well, if the fair is stupid, there'll be fun in the crowd, anyhow. We'll all take it in. On second thoughts, though," Captain Jack added, with a smile, "I don't know whether we'll be able to tear January from the soil. How's that, January?" he called to the fat boy. "Think you could leave your farming for a day?"

"Ho, yus, thank ye, sir. Huncle Hisaiah and Hi 'ave 'oed the corn, ye know, and we've almost caught hup with the potato bugs. Huncle Hisaiah's a-going 'imself, ye know. 'E says it's foolishness, most of it, but 'e goes to see the folks 'e knows, ye know."

"And we'll go to see the folks we don't know!" laughed Lorimer.

Yet, little as he expected it, they would meet a man with whom he had undergone a thrilling

experience; and under that man's pilotage Lorimer and McGrady and Lou Mains were destined to figure in a strange and amusing adventure.

CHAPTER XIV

GIRL FRIENDS AS WELCOME VISITORS

BUT Thursday was still two days ahead, and Wednesday was not to be destitute of events. One of them was foreshadowed — though nobody knew exactly what was going to happen — on Wednesday morning, when Harry Lee drove over to camp in a great hurry, and, after a mysterious conference with Jeff, hunted up Captain Jack, Terry McGrady and Ned Harriott.

“ You three are not to leave camp this afternoon on any account! ” Harry said, impressively. “ I’m not at liberty to tell you why you ought to stay around, but it’ll be very much to your advantage to do so. How’s that, Jeff? ”

“ That’s about the way I size it up, ” Bussey agreed. “ If they should go rampagin’ off to-day they’d — well, they’d deserve to get lost and have the bears eat ’em! ”

“ By the way, I fancy the Roxbridge boy, Pratt, is in this, too, ” Harry added. “ Keep him in camp till you find out, till 2 o’clock, say. Who’s captain of the camp to-day? ”

Ned Harriott held out his hands. “ Any need

to ask?" he said. "Look at the burns I got, cooking breakfast!"

"They'll be cured between this and supper time," Lee chuckled. "And since you're captain, Ned, and can't go away anyhow, I leave these three in your charge. Tie 'em to the trees if they show any disposition to wander!"

"See here, Lou, you're out of it," Harry went on, "so why can't you drive back and spend the day with me? Every one wants to see you, and we'll try to give you a good time." And Mains nodded, with an eagerness that was not lost on Jack and Jeff, and, waving his hand toward the group, made straight for Lee's wagon.

"He'll go back to-morrow night, I don't think!" Jeff said to Lorimer. "He won't be willin' to leave Lee's before snow flies!"

But before Captain Jack could reply, a groan of disgust from Jeff suddenly turned his attention. Stalking solemnly forward, came old Jared Peabody, with a scowl on his leathery face.

"Say!" the visitor exploded, "what kind o' messes you fellers cookin' here? I don't b'lieve I'm called on to stand the smells that comes from this hoorah's nest three times a day, and I ain't a-goin' to do it, nuther!"

The words provoked a general grin. There were none but clean and wholesome odours around the camp, and the notion that they could reach nearly a mile struck the boys as

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funnier than any complaint that the cranky old fellow had made yet. But when he got his face straight Jeff pointed at Ned.

"That feller burned some water this mornin'," Jeff said. "If he ever does it again we're goin' to drum him out of camp!"

"Well, you better! Ketch any of ye burnin' water under my nose —" But at that point the boys had to roar. Then at last old Jared seemed to awaken to the absurdity of his threat, and, shaking his fist at the group, he went off muttering.

"Sure there can't be anything crazier than that running around in Massachusetts," Terry commented. "'Tis safer its neighbours would be if it had a ring through its nose and was tied up in a stall."

"Oh, Jared's a pesky old nuisance, but there's no harm in him," Jeff answered. "I s'pose he makes some kind of roar to Uncle Isaiah as often as once a week the year round. But uncle just tells him to go hang himself, and keeps right on about his business, and that's the end of it."

Still smiling at the ridiculous episode, Captain Jack turned away. Sewall Ford, Pratt and Will Van Dusen were among the group to which chance led his steps, and as he approached he heard Sewall say, "Stump you to do it!" and Pratt answer, "I won't take a dare! I'll do it, you bet!" Lorimer stopped.

"What's the game, boys?" he said.

"Oh, I've been telling Pratt he can't go down the other side of the ledge, and he says he will," Ford replied.

"Anything down there that you want, Charles?" Lorimer asked. Pratt stared at him wonderingly.

"Why, no," he answered at length. "I won't take a dare, though!"

"Won't you? I would — take it and leave it," was Lorimer's quiet reply. "A 'stump' is a fool argument, anyway, and a fellow's generally a fool to take one up. If you went down the side of the ledge it wouldn't prove anything, except that you're willing to risk your limbs needlessly — and that's nothing to brag about. Keep on your own side, and save your nerve and courage for some sensible use.

"Besides," he added, with a smile, "if we go in that direction our old friend Peabody will be after us for trespass!" And the boys laughed at that, as he meant they should, and forgot their silly plan.

One couldn't say that life in camp was ever dull. There was always something turning up, and it seemed to the other fellows, sometimes, as if it was work enough to keep the younger ones straight — indeed, Captain Jack and Terry exchanged more than one groan over the "preaching" they had to do. But to-day the hours were long in passing.

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Something was going to happen, according to Harry Lee, and he had named several of the fellows as chiefly concerned in it. But they didn't know what it was; and when, a little after noon, Jeff quietly slipped away, they didn't even have the satisfaction of worrying him for information, and then it became rather difficult to kill time.

Not for long, though. Before 2 o'clock Jeff appeared again, triumphantly escorting May Roxton, Rose Ahearn, Clare Bell, Nora McGrady, Marion Woodside, from Roxbridge, and Ned Harriott's mother. That was the secret and surprise, that the girls were coming over to call, and there is no need of saying that their friends were pleased to see them.

"But why didn't you let us know, so we could have fixed up a little?" Lorimer demanded.

"We didn't want you to fix up. Wanted to see your every-day housekeeping," May answered merrily.

"Sure you'll see it at its worst to-day," Terry suggested, with his eye on Clare. "'Tis Ned's day in charge. He's responsible for everything, from the east wind to the dab of smut on his own nose."

"That's all right. I haven't blown up any oil stoves, yet," was Ned's rejoinder. Terry had been guilty of that very thing a few days earlier; but of course the accusation never touched him.

"And who says I ever blew up an oil stove? 'Twas the oil blew up," he answered. "If you'll walk to the top of the ledge with me, Rose, I'll show you where the stove went," he added.

Of course that signalled a scattering, though it did not take place at once. The girls and their chaperon had to see everything in the camp and have every detail of the daily life explained to them; and every camper wished, naturally, to pay his respects and ask a hundred questions about his friends in Millvale. But after awhile the congenial couples got together and sought quiet places for more intimate conversations.

"You didn't tell me why you haven't gone to the Beach as usual, this summer," Captain Jack suggested as he and May Roxton strolled apart from the crowd. "If you're not going, why not persuade Mamma Roxton to come to Four Corners? Jeff's Uncle Isaiah would put you up, and you could be here at the camp from 6 A. M. to 9 P. M. —"

"How lovely!" May interrupted mockingly. "No, we think it's better to leave you boys to yourselves and give you a chance to find out how useless and helpless you are. Seriously, papa has been bothered about that cottage of ours — repairs were needed, that he didn't find out about until we were on the point of going there — and now I wouldn't wonder if we spent most of the summer at home in Millvale. Uncle George

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Burtis wants us to come up to Bethlehem. Perhaps we'll go, later on, for a fortnight or so."

"Yes, do. Go and see King Tom, and give him my love."

"You'll have plenty of chances to do that, yourself. Uncle George wants you to come with us, or at least to come up on Saturdays while we're there, and if you do either you can talk to the horse all you wish. Frankly, I'd rather talk to him than to the jockey who rides him. I think the horse is the more intelligent and agreeable beast!"

Lorimer laughed. "We won't mind, as long as he runs away from Colonel Mills's Tyrant," he said. "By the way, how did you happen to bring the Roxbridge girl? Tom Bell isn't here, so what's the attraction for her?"

"Who, Marion Woodside? She came over to Millvale, this morning, and I found she had some pleasant things to say about the Pratt boy, and I asked her to join us because I thought it would do him good to hear them."

Nor could any one have doubted this, who had listened to the messages of which that visitor was the bearer.

"Rob Marr says you're all right now, Charles, if Lorimer has taken you up," she reported. "Rob and Catherwood say you must drop around and see them when you get home — and I say you must, too! Now you've made a good start,

it'll be every bit your own fault if you lose friends or get into trouble again!"

Pratt nodded. He knew it.

"I saw your Uncle Horton, yesterday," Marion continued. "Such a change in him, you can't think! He seemed to be actually proud that you were camping with a party of athletes. He wanted to talk about it. I guess the athletes of Roxbridge High will have an easier time after this — thanks to Captain Jack!"

"Lorimer's all right," Pratt muttered.

"Yes, and so is May. May is just lovely! I can't imagine why she's so nice to me, but I'm thankful she is, and —"

"Oh, you're all right yourself!" Pratt interrupted. "Tom Bell thinks so, and everybody in Millvale swears by what he says!"

It was not a very graceful utterance, but he meant it as a compliment, and because compliments were not in his line the girl found the novelty welcome. She flushed and dimpled and started to courtesy. Then her eyes brightened roguishly, and she waved her hand in a gesture that took in the camp.

"Everybody is all right, Charles!" she cried.

CHAPTER XV

NICK AND NOCK AND MERRY MAC

PERHAPS the sight of the people from home had made everybody a little restless. It was noticeable that night that there was more talk of Millvale and the gym than usual; and if the weather had not been so perfect that it made one dread the thought of living in a house, and if there had not been a visit to the fair on the next day's programme, there might have been some desertions.

Not that Lou Mains would have deserted! Apparently he had forgotten all about that plan to stay two days only. Indeed, he had already promised Harry Lee to join the fair-goers — even though Josie wouldn't be among them.

And when the time came for the big wagons, provided by Harry and Jeff, to start from the camp, every camper was in the load. The tents could look out for themselves, the fellows thought. Tramps were not likely to come that way, and all Four Corners was friendly.

It was a jolly and noisy party, of course, as well as a large one. The wagons kept quite near together, over most of the road, and when they had to draw apart, well, it was only a matter of

stretching one's lungs a little. But as they approached the fair-grounds, Terry, who had been performing on January's tin whistle, dropped it with a gesture of despair.

"Sure it beats me!" he said. "'Tis a 40-horsepower megaphone one would want, to be heard above that racket!"

It was as Harry Lee had promised, a lively place — surprisingly so, for such an isolated region. There must have been a great display of livestock, judging by the bellowing, bleating, and crowing, and two or three thousand people, all talking at the tops of their voices, were on the grounds — not to mention the fakirs, who were present in numbers, and taking no pains to speak in whispers.

Jack and Terry, Lou Mains and Harry Lee wandered off together, patronizing all the side shows and joining the crowds around the stalls, by way of making the grand circuit, as Terry said. But they had not gone very far when Terry suddenly caught Lorimer's arm and drew his attention to a group of persons massed around something that occupied a central open space.

"Logan!" Terry cried. "Logan and his balloon — waiting for us!"

"Not much!" laughed Lorimer. "Once is enough!"

Yet he was glad to meet the nervy aeronaut — with whom, as told in "Jack Lorimer's Cham-

pions," he and McGrady had made a perilous balloon voyage; and Logan for his part declared that he took the encounter as a sign of luck.

"My friend Mr. King," he said, calling up a small man with a bristling red moustache, who seemed to be viewing the preparations rather gloomily. "He's going up with me to-day — just to keep himself out of mischief, he says.

"Mighty good, square fellow, King is," he explained, aside, "and had the best thing on the grounds, if it hadn't been upset by his people failing to show up, somehow. See that big tent over there? Well, that's his, and he could have filled it like a shot, over and over. As it is, he's stranded, as you might say. It'll take all he's got left to get to the next fair."

"What's his line of business?" Terry asked, indifferently. Logan handed him a poster, and McGrady read it aloud:

THE MASKED BOXERS !

The Greatest Marvel of the Age!

NICK AND NOCK, THE BOY LIGHT-
WEIGHTS

Who Hit Hard, Hit Fair, and Keep on
Hitting !

Come and See the Science of
MERRY MAC, THE MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPION

Challenges All the World at 158 lbs. and under
21 years !

Sample His Lightning Left-handers!

Admission — Only One Dime!

"Masked boxers, eh?" Terry repeated. He grinned and glanced at Captain Jack.

"That's the idea," Logan nodded. "King's three are clever, but he says the element of mystery is what draws the crowds, and I guess he's right. When they see a mighty good boxer with a mask on, half of 'em think it may be a champion pugilist out for a holiday, see?"

"Sure I see — I see some fun in this, if Lou is willing to pose as Merry Mac, and meet all comers!" Terry chuckled. "Lou's heavy for middleweight and Jack and I are a little overgrown for lightweights, but the spectators won't mind if we give 'em their money's worth, eh?"

"By George, if you'd only go through the show once, you'd be pulling King out of a bad hole!" Logan cried; and King himself, not daring yet to hope, watched their faces with feverish eagerness.

"I'm with you," Mains announced, with a chuckle. Partly for the fun of the thing, partly to do the showman a kindness, he would chance a meeting with anybody of his weight who might

turn up. And Captain Jack, for the same reasons, was more than willing to spar a few rounds with Terry, and was already thinking how they could ensure a crowd.

"Where's January?" he asked. "We want him and his tin whistle to head a street parade. Hi, there, January! Come with us, and we'll show you some sport!" Waving their hands to the smiling Logan, the three boxers and the fat boy followed the exultant King.

The showman had made his "pitch" on ground that rose up to a higher, flat surface at the back, and on this was roped off a regulation ring. A little compartment in one corner served as a dressing-room, and from this, Lou, Jack and Terry presently emerged, in belts, gymnasium trunks and white satin vests, their eyes twinkling through the black silk masks.

"Now, then, January," said Terry, "out with that tooter of yours, and we'll start a procession that will draw the giddy throng!"

In single file, with the fat boy in advance, and King behind them handing out his bills, the boys sauntered through the fair, in and out and round about the crowds. Everybody turned to look, and when, presently, they swung round and back toward the tent, many followed. Tired of the rest of the shows, people quickly caught on to this new sensation, and the followers had grown from dozens to hundreds when they

reached the big tent, and the masked boxers, with Harry Lee at their back, dived inside.

“Walk up, walk up!” roared King. “See the grand old game played as it ought to be! See the Masked Boxers, the wonder of the age! Watch Nick and Nock, and put on the gloves with Merry Mac, if you dare! Plank down your dimes, now, gentlemen, while there’s room at the front!” And the crowd, eager for novelty, swarmed down upon the tent, and fairly begged King to take their money and let them in quick.

There was no doubt about the show being a success, so far. Even around the dressing-room the tent was packed, and the three Masked Boxers found it rather a squeeze to struggle through the ropes. Coached by Harry Lee, who knew many of those in front, Mains began to speak, or rather to yell.

“Gentlemen, admirers of the manly art,” he said, “the Masked Boxers will now try to give you your money’s worth. First on the programme will be a match, fought to a finish, between Nick and Nock, the two finest underage boxers in America!”

The crowd roared approval. Lou held up his hand again for silence.

“Order!” he yelled. “To show that everything is fair and aboveboard, we intend to ask members of the audience to officiate at this match. I see before me two well-known gentlemen, whom you

all know as good sportsmen, and I ask them to do us the honour to act as timekeeper and referee — Mr. James Letson and Mr. Mark Shaw."

There was loud applause for Letson and Shaw, and it was repeated when Mains called two clean-looking lads, whom Lee recognized as football players, to act as seconds. Then Mains went back to the dressing-room and Jack and Terry stepped forward.

They stripped well and they looked as if they meant business, but this was a critical time and King was watching his audience anxiously. Crowds are notoriously fickle, and if people suddenly began to imagine they had paid their money to see nothing but a boys' pounding match, there would be trouble. But there was hardly a sound in the tent as the two Masked Boxers shook hands.

"Time!" called the referee.

Terry immediately let out, straight from the shoulder, and Jack would have been driven off his feet if he had not ducked smartly. He countered heavily on Terry's ribs, and the crowd roared approval of this rattling beginning.

Nobody could say this fight was a running match. Jack knew the interest must be kept going, and he led an attack that fairly drove Terry back to the ropes; and Terry played the game as desperately as if he had been fighting a professional for the championship. He took two

swinging blows, half guarded, without wincing, and then clinched. The referee called to them, and Terry broke away at the cost of a clip on the ear. Jack came in at him rather incautiously, and got an uppercut that laid him out.

"Time!" said the referee.

The advantage of the round was all with Terry, but, though Jack had done his best, he was too pleased at the way the audience took it to mind the setback. The crowd was buzzing with excitement.

"Smart boys, ain't they!"

"I bate ye! They're scienced, too! They know where them plunks o' theirs are goin'!"

"Time!"

In the second round both combatants went at it harder still, and at the close they were pretty even. The crowd grew more and more excited, and those outside the tent were howling at King to let them in.

In the third round Jack got at Terry's wind with pretty serious effect, and in the fourth put him on his back, only the call of "Time!" saving him from defeat. Very evenly matched the young boxers were, for in the next round Terry recovered his wind, and in the sixth he laid Jack out in his turn.

The eighth was fought carefully, for both boys were getting winded with so much hard hitting. But in the ninth, meeting in the middle of the

ring, they arrived at the finish, Jack handing out a right and left that fairly laid Terry low. Gamely as he tried, he could not come to time.

A tremendous shout greeted the winner.

"The fight is awarded to Nick," called the referee. "Whoever he is, he's as handy with his fists as any youngster I ever saw — and the other isn't more than a hair's breadth behind him!"

CHAPTER XVI

A SURPRISE FOR THE LOCAL CHAMPION

As the two chums shook hands cordially, to the accompaniment of a storm of shouting, Mains made his way inside the ropes. He talked for a minute to Mr. Letson, and that gentleman promptly advanced and called for order.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "I am requested to announce that the famous pugilist here beside me, who calls himself Merry Mac, is open to fight a match to a finish, under Queensberry rules, with any one of his weight on this fair-ground!"

The crowd cheered eagerly as Mains stepped forward.

"As a sportsman myself," cried Letson, "I consider this as fair a sporting offer as ever I heard. Now, then, who takes it?"

"Any purse hung up?" asked somebody in the crowd. Mains shook his head.

"No purse!" called the referee. "This is sport, not prize-fighting! Who's out for the honour and glory?"

Several started toward the ring, but the foremost was the heaviest of them all. He was a big,

bulky, shambling youth, with shoulders like the arms of a gallows, and a squat, brutal face.

"Put me down for this!" he said. "I can knock the stuffin' out of anybody round here. Let me get at his nibs in the mask, and I'll send him to bed for a month."

"Good boy, Tom!" shouted several. "You'll cut his teeth for him!"

"You're over 158, Tom Bowles!" said the referee.

"No, I ain't," snarled the shock-headed youth. "I'm under age, anyhow, and you know it!"

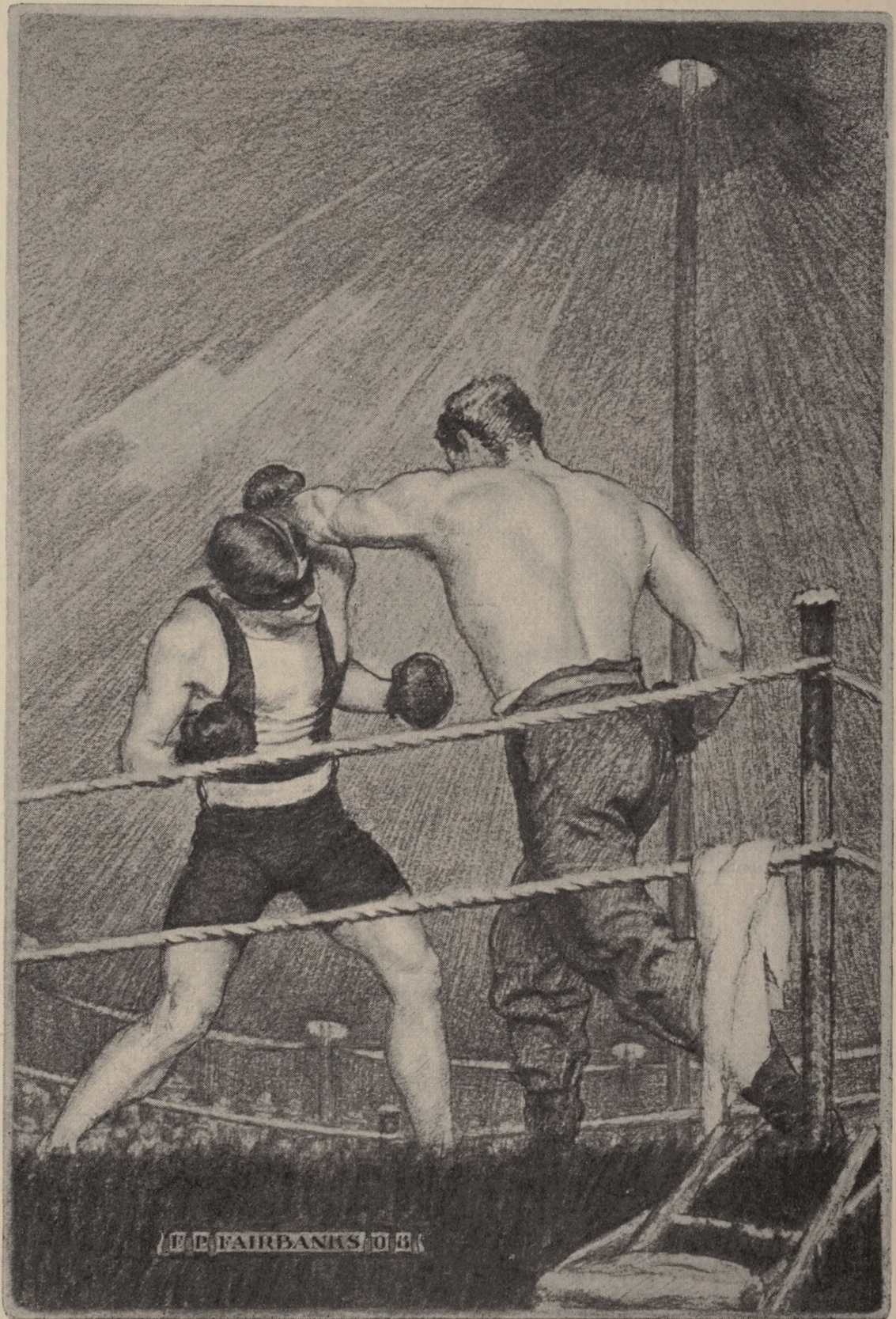
"He's under twenty-one, certainly," said the referee aside to Mains, looking very serious, "but I'm pretty sure he's away over-weight — and he's a heavy slugger — the terror of the neighbourhood!"

"That's all right; let him come on," Mains answered quietly. Then he turned to the crowd.

"I don't know his weight," he cried, "but if Tom Bowles is your best man, send him along!"

"Tom Bowles! Tom Bowles!" shouted the audience, and the uproar grew as Tom, grinning maliciously, went into the dressing-room. He borrowed a pair of canvas shoes, and soon reappeared, stripped to the waist.

His chest was hairy as a door-mat, and looked enormously powerful. His arms were like young trees, and being the taller, as well as much the stouter, he had the longer reach. A blow with



F. C. FAIRBANKS O. B.

“ THE LOCAL CHAMPION MADE A RUSH LIKE A BULL.”

all his might behind it must put Mains out of business. The crowd fancied it knew already how the match would end.

There was an ugly leer on the big fellow's face as he stepped into the ring and shook hands with Mains rather contemptuously. The spectators stood in expectant silence.

"Time!" said the referee.

The local champion made a rush like a bull, driving in tremendous blows straight from the shoulder. He meant to knock Mains out at once, and if he had planted those blows as he intended the fight would have ended right away. But Mains's head went down like a flash. The first blow brushed the top of it, and as he side-stepped the second whizzed past his ear.

Stopping another smashing hit, Mains put in a jab with his right that left a dull red blur on Bowles's face, and leaped back into the centre of the ring. On came Tom again, to receive another jab in the same spot, and Mains got in return a swinging "side-winder" that made his head ring. Then came the cry of "Time!"

The audience, so far, hardly knew what to think. Tom's blows were so terrific that some of them were bound to get home and end the match. That was the general belief. But the more knowing ones noticed that Mains was as fresh as paint, while the hairy chest of his rival was rising and falling faster than it ought.

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"Lou'll wind him up yet," muttered Jack to Terry, as they watched from the dressing-room door.

Up came Mains for the second time, and Bowles went to work in the same way. So savage was his rush, and so well judged, that he drove Mains into a corner, and, once he had him there, the local champion put in his straight-arm blows, each given with a hoggish grunt that showed its power. Mains clinched. As he broke away he received a staggering uppercut and a heavy smash in the ribs.

As he gained the open space Bowles was upon him again. But this time the result was surprising — to every one, that is, save Jack and Terry. Bowles had lowered his guard. Full in upon his mouth came a left-hander like a thunderbolt. The bulky youth went over backward as if a pile-driver had come down on him and at the same moment the referee cried, "Time!"

The crowd was in an uproar as Bowles was pulled to his second's knee. Many thought the local champion would decide he had had enough.

"Sure that was one of the real old sort," commented Terry. "Another one or two will turn Bowles into broken crockery."

"Time!" cried the referee.

Now it was Lou Mains's time, so to speak. He had sized up his opponent's peculiar style and avoided him easily. Meanwhile he planted blow

after blow on Bowles's ribs, and it was easy to see how they told on the bulky body; for Tom's wind was spoiled by tobacco and liquor, while Mains was in perfect condition, and his muscles were like watch-springs.

In fact, Tom Bowles was making his last rally. With mad, furious blows he bore down on Mains, who guarded or dodged them with perfect ease. The uproar grew to a perfect storm. Everybody shouted at once.

Then came one last lightning-blow from Mains. His left, so swift that it could hardly be followed, came up to the point of the big fellow's chin with the power of a steam-hammer behind it. Tom Bowles was fairly lifted off his feet, and fell flat upon his back.

The big slugger lay panting, his knees drawn up. The timekeeper's voice, counting the seconds, reached him, and his feet moved as if to try to rise. But it was useless: he was knocked out.

"Seven, eight, nine, ten!"

A deafening roar hailed the last word; but the referee's deep-chested shout rang out above the storm of outcries.

"The stranger wins! Give him three cheers, boys!"

Cheer upon cheer rang out for Mains, who drew off his gloves, and offered to shake hands with his vanquished rival as soon as Bowles was helped to his feet. The beaten man, however, turned

away with a scowl — a foolish thing to do, for it earned him a hearty hissing. In fact, nobody was very sorry at the defeat of the local champion, who was a good deal of a bully.

"Well done, young man!" cried the referee, slapping Mains on the back. "I don't know who you are, but you spar like a Trojan!"

"Much obliged," Mains answered. "And much obliged to you and the other gentleman for judging our little show!" And he turned toward the crowd.

"Now, boys," he said, "three cheers for the referee and timekeeper, who've helped us like the good sportsmen they are!" With cheers that almost lifted the top out of the tent, the spectators reluctantly dispersed.

As the fellows were dressing, King, the proprietor of the show, came hurrying toward them. He was waving a telegram, and his face was radiant.

"There's a chance my three will reach here in season so we can give a show to-night," he said. "But even if they don't, I can get to my next stand without borrowing money from Logan or having my tent attached for debt — and it's all owing to you gentlemen that I'm out of the hole.

"Say, it was a ripping show!" King went on, "and I can't thank you enough for pitching in and giving it. I wish there was something I could do for you! If ever there comes a time when

Tony King can give you a lift, you can count on him — and Ned Logan will tell you I'm not one of the forgetful kind!"

"It's all right, Mr. King," Captain Jack answered. "We've had a good time ourselves, and we're glad we could do you a good turn. If you ever happen around Millvale way, drop into our gym and say hello!"

They left King counting up his dimes, the happiest man on the fair-grounds, and sauntered out to look for their own crowd. Elverton was one of the first they found. It proved that he had been one of their audience, and he was full of the amazing resemblance between themselves and Nick and Nock and Merry Mac.

"The big fellow that looked like you, Mains — why, even his voice was like yours!" Elverton said. "But he talked pretty long sentences, used some words he didn't have to, so —"

"I was making a speech, then," Lou chuckled. "Can't very well do that without using words, you know!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE HEMPEROR OF THE HATMOSPHERE

BEFORE the day was over, and before the fun of the fair had really worn off, January Jones hunted up Lorimer and inveigled him behind the tents. "Hi've got it, sir!" the fat boy whispered, hoarsely.

"Eh, January? What's that you've got?" Captain Jack replied.

"Hi've got me huplifting hidea! For me h invention that Hi told you about, ye know. It's an humbrella. Hi can 'itch it hon in two shakes. So Hi want you and the hothers to come back to Millvale for a day. Hi'll show you!"

Back they went, the score of them, not unwilling to revisit home for an hour, and wondering much what they would see. For two or three months January had been dropping mysterious hints about an invention of his, but not even Lorimer knew what it was. Nor did they learn much from the first glance at the strange creation over which they found the fat boy busy when they met, by appointment, at the top of Shooter's Hill.

"Name it, January," Sewall Ford suggested, as he stared. "Is it an airship, scarecrow, mowing-machine, or torpedo-boat?"

"It's the Hemperor of the Hatmosphere!" January said, with ill-concealed pride.

"The who? Say it again!"

"It's a wagon and a flying-machine and a boat, hall in one!" the fat boy explained. "Hi'm a-going to send 'er down 'ill and hup in the hair, to show you 'ow she works."

"Ever tried it, January?" asked Captain Jack.

"No, sir."

"Guess we'd better make the first test on Reed's Hill, hadn't we? It's a hot morning, I know, but we'll help you trundle the thing over — it isn't so very far — and there are no trolley cars there to bother you. Those wheels of yours don't look to me as if they'd last very long if they happened to slew into the car-track."

January glanced critically at his invention.

"Hi got the bloomink wheels hoff a baby carriage, ye know," he said. "Maybe they would be heasy bust, what? Hi'll cover 'er hup again and we'll take 'er across to Reed's 'Ill, as you say, sir."

Captain Jack took care to lead the way by quiet streets and many a short cut. Even when covered, the fat boy's masterpiece was calculated to provoke curiosity and collect crowds. But January believed in it, and as he went he chattered gaily:

"Hi'll 'ave a haluminum car hinstead of this soap box, and a haluminum mast hinstead of this clothes pole," he said. "Hi'll 'ave silk sails, not this bloomink canvas, and oiled waterproof cloth for a parachute, hin place of that humbrella.

"Hi'll 'ave rubber-tired wheels, and Hi'll put in a motor to give more power, and — "

"But where does the boat come in?" Janvrin wanted to know.

"Turn 'er hover, and the parachute becomes the bottom of the boat, ye know," January explained.

"With the four wheels and things slamming around on top of it?"

"Ho, no, it's a collapsible combination, ye know."

"Well, I guess that's right," Matt Janvrin said, with a wink toward Lorimer. January didn't heed.

"Hi wish Hi 'ad the bloomink motor, now!" he lamented. "Now Hi 'aven't, Hi maybe can't work me flying-machine hunless the wind would blow."

Pausing at this moment at the top of Reed's Hill — their winter coasting place — January once more uncovered his invention and began to explain.

"What's that, January?" Terry McGrady asked, laying his hand on something that looked very familiar, even when mounted on a cart-body under a sail.

"That's a washtub," the fat boy answered, unblushingly. "Hi 'ad to use it for the 'ood of me car, ye know."

"What you got an anchor for?" demanded Chapin, who had been investigating at the rear of the machine.

"Hairships 'ave hanchors, and so do boats, and this is both, ye know," was January's dignified response.

"Now before you start, January, just tell us how you expect the thing to work," Captain Jack suggested.

"Hi start 'er up with the sail and the motor, ye know," January replied. "When she's going fast enough Hi pull this string, so, and the sail falls down across these sticks, and the wind and the motor together lift me hinto the hair. That's why Hi call 'er the Hemperor of the Hatmosphere, ye know!"

"I'm thinking you may get lifted into kingdom come!" Terry commented.

"Ho, no, sir: Hi've calculated, ye know. This model hought to lift me, and a haluminum machine twice as large, lighter and stronger would carry —"

"Another ass," Horace White put in.

January stared at him gravely.

"Ho, no, Mr. White," he said. "Hi wouldn't want to take you, so it ain't no bloomink use to fish for a hinvitation!"

"Sure you'd better go lie down, Horace," chuckled Terry. Horace himself had laughed.

"I'm going down to the foot of the hill, that's where, to be ready to pick up the pieces," he said. "Just about forty seconds after we see him tearing down this hill at the rate of sixty miles an hour, grinning like an ape with a cocoanut, there'll be —"

But here Captain Jack interrupted. January was bound to try his invention, and probably his cart would go down the hill all right, unless he lost his nerve, and forgot the plans he had made for controlling it. It was to guard against that loss of nerve that Lorimer broke off Horace's remark, which would probably have ended with a gloomy prediction.

"January'll come out all right," he said, loudly and cheerfully. "I guess, though, the foot of the hill will be the best place to watch him from, and unless we can do something up here to help, perhaps we'd better all go down there. Can you start her, January?" he added.

"Ho, yes, sir, thank ye, sir," was the fat boy's answer. "If you'll go down there by the back of Blodgett's 'ouse, the place we used to coast to last winter, Hi'll come a-'umming!"

He seemed so certain he could handle the thing, that finally the fellows left him to himself and started down to take a position where they could see it all.

"Shall we call out Blackbeard Blodgett and his sweet wife, Creepy Moses, to look on?" Horace White asked.

"I'm thinking January will be making a call on them, anyhow," was Terry's answer. "He may go down the chimney, or he may go under the back steps, but if his wind-up doesn't come somewhere on Blodgett's territory, 'twill be contrary to all the traditions of this band of out-laws!"

"There's no wind to carry him there," argued Horace. "These little puffs and squalls —"

"He's off!" somebody yelled.

And indeed the fat boy was almost "off," in another sense, at the very start. As he squatted down in his soap box and raised the big sail, a gust of wind caught it, and the Emperor of the Atmosphere was all but capsized.

By great good luck the crazy contrivance righted itself. At an ever-increasing speed this newest terror of the highway swept down the hill, its proud and smiling inventor recking naught of consequences as he peered over his washtub "hood."

But as the fearsome Emperor sped downward, anything but majestically — with the rattle and crash of a bull in a china shop, in fact — the laughing crowd at the foot of the hill heard something else — a sound of movement on the road behind them.

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In an old, old buggy, drawn by an old, old horse, Prof. Distress, Blodgett's new assistant, was coming down Woodlawn Street, the street that skirted the base of the hill. The reins had been in his way, apparently, and he had dropped them. He was leaning forward, his nose in a book, which he held in both hands, and he had no more idea of the presence of the Emperor or the boys than if they had been in China.

But the poor old wreck of a horse was showing signs of nervousness, as he heard the terrifying sound of January's descent. Perhaps he would summon energy to make a run for it. If he did not, it looked an even chance that the Emperor and the buggy would come to an end together.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN THE EMPEROR TOOK PASSENGERS

PROF. D'ESTREES, alias Distress, had been spending the night with a fellow-countryman, a market gardener, whose place was in a rather remote section of Doverdale. Neither steam cars nor electrics ran very near, and the professor had walked over.

This morning he thought he must get back to Blodgett's, because he had an appointment; but his friend argued, and the professor himself had agreed, that it was too hot to walk. And after they had debated the situation for half an hour or so, it was finally decided that the professor should borrow the oldest turnout in his friend's barn, and go home in comfort, even though he went slowly.

To be sure, the professor knew nothing about driving; but the horse didn't need to be driven. Just let him alone, and he would amble along at the rate of four miles an hour, and stop when he got the word. So the professor headed him into the right road, and then dropped the reins over the front of the buggy and went to reading.

Until he came opposite Blodgett's, he had scarcely looked up. But it was a swift and terrible awakening he had then, when a tremendous, united yell smote suddenly upon his ears and, glancing around, he saw January's devil-wagon bearing down upon him.

Then in the same moment the professor and the horse did desperate things; for the horse ran away, and the professor jumped.

The horse escaped. But in the very middle of his leap the Emperor of the Atmosphere scooped up the professor, much as an express engine scoops up water. With not enough breath in him to utter a squeal, the professor found himself spread-eagled, face downward, on the "hood" of the on-rushing car.

Found himself! No, he hadn't the slightest idea where he was or what had happened. But his sudden descent on January's vehicle was responsible for two things.

To a considerable extent the car slackened speed. His weight did that. Furthermore the shock of the collision threw out January's anchor.

That bounced once or twice on Woodlawn Street. Then, as the cable tautened, it began to swing from side to side in the wake of the flying Emperor in a manner that fully justified the scramble the boys began to make.

Most of them had been standing on Mr. Lanard's land, between the street and Blodgett's lot. White

and Ford were farther in from the street than the others. As the car clattered down-hill, they had rather congratulated themselves on their judicious caution.

But suddenly the swinging anchor struck the trunk of a tree and rebounded. Horace White, stepping aside to avoid the car, as suddenly found a stout rope around his waist. The anchor swung round again. Almost before he knew it Horace, with great strides, was pounding along behind the Emperor.

And it was in this fashion, with Prof. Distress hanging on in front, and Horace in tow, that January's invention flashed across Blodgett's lot.

"St-st-stop her, you clown!" roared Horace desperately.

The professor didn't say much. He had not yet recovered his breath. But there was murder in his eye as he surveyed January from his uncomfortable position on the "hood."

January might not have heard him, anyway. To tell the truth, the fat boy was wondering how and where he could dump the professor without doing him too much injury.

"Stop her!" yelled Horace White once more, as the tow-rope slammed him up against a trellis on which the housekeeper had trained her sweet peas. A flower bed was the next thing in his way, and he took that with a running hop, step

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and jump that any athlete would have been proud to match.

The effort gave him a little slack. Laying hold of the rope, he hung back desperately. He didn't seem to accomplish much. But it didn't really matter, for Fate was fixing to do the job of stopping the car.

January looked around. He had realized that somebody was towing behind, and he wanted to see who it was. In the moment he turned his head the Emperor pitched down the embankment in front of Blodgett's lot.

And this was a place where the professor's weight did have an effect. As he felt the car tip forward and downward, he gave a sort of hitch and kick to get aboard, or at least to strengthen his hold. That was "the last straw." As the car struck the gutter, over it went, spilling January into the gutter on the opposite side and burying the professor himself.

"Sacré nom! Help! Help! I vill die — no one shall safe me!" Prayers and curses and threats came alternately in muffled tones from under the ruins. But when the fellows dug the professor out they found, to their sincere relief, that he seemed to have suffered little beyond the shock to his nerves, except a bloody nose.

About that time January sat up and looked around in a bewildered way.

"Hi forgot to make 'er fly, what?" he muttered.

"Sure, you made Horace fly, and that looked just as pretty!" chuckled Terry.

"Be 'anged if Hi know what 'appened, ye know!" the fat boy went on. But Prof. Distress soon told him.

"I shall have you arrest!" the professor cried, dancing about and gesticulating fiercely. "Zis outrage shall be atone — to me! Scélerat! Cochon! Pig-dog! I bleed my nose — at you — for me, for me, Philippe d'Estrees!"

But of course matters couldn't be allowed to rest that way, and while Jim Elverton started a hunt for the professor's horse — which, as it proved, had not run more than one hundred yards before he stopped and went to eating grass by the side of the road — Captain Jack was busy explaining and apologizing to the professor, who finally consented to admit satisfaction.

"To ze fat I say nossing, nossing," he announced, with a wave of his hand toward January, who was standing and staring disconsolately at the wreck of his Emperor. "But to zis," he added, "zis horrible tremendous — zis monster assassinate — I break — I smash!" And if there had been much left to smash he probably would have smashed it, judging by the way he glared at the car.

"Cheer up, January!" Captain Jack said soothingly. "You made a good try at doing something original, and it's better to try and fail than it is

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to stick in a rut. When father hears about this, he'll think twice as much of you as he did before."

" 'Twas a good try — and 'twas worth watching!" Terry added, with a sober face, but a twinkling eye. "I'm thinking we might take a collection and make good for the incidental damage — Blodgett's trellis and Mrs. O'Brien's washtub, and such. Sure, the boy has worked hard, and he's risked his neck, and 'tis not fair that we, who had nothing to do but look on and admire, should leave all the burdens for him to bear!"

It was a popular suggestion, and everybody seemed glad to accept it. But though Horace White, like the others, put his hand in his pocket, he added with a kind of laughing growl: "Seems to me I had something to do but look on and admire."

"Sure, I thought you were training for the next field day!" Terry answered. "They were fine long leaps you made, Horace! We were just waiting to applaud till we saw you go through the dining-room window and out the front door!"

"Well, I came mighty near it! 'Twasn't January's fault, though. Accidents will happen. Tail on to the rope, now, and we'll haul his truck back to the gym."

"Hi'd like to leave the bloomink stuff right 'ere in the gutter!" said the fat boy, mournfully.

"Nonsense! What's the use of lying down that way? Take your medicine, standing up, as you always have!" Captain Jack replied. Yet January was still gloomy.

"Hi didn't hought to 'ave messed with it," he said. "Hi hought to 'ave stayed hover at Four Corners, 'elpink Huncle Hisaiah 'oe 'is corn!"

"Easy enough to go back," Jeff Bussey suggested. "The only thing that worries me is that you fellows won't stay in camp six or eight weeks, instead of only two or three."

Probably when it came to the point it would have been pretty hard to keep January away from Millvale. In fact everybody seemed to be thinking a good deal about Millvale — everybody, that is, but Lou Mains, who appeared to have completely forgotten that he had come for only two or three days! Nobody reminded him of the change of plan that his meeting with Josie Lee had brought about. They didn't want to run the risk of frightening him away; and, as Jack said to Terry, he had earned a long vacation.

But the last days had to come, for Lou as well as the others, and before they knew it they were loading the baggage into two of Jeff's big wagons — Josie and Harry and a few more of the friends looking on, to see the last of it, as they said.

"Sure this isn't the last of it!" Terry amended. "There'll be some more of it next year, and next

year, and the year after that — unless Jeff gets tired of us, and sets on old Jared Peabody to drive us away!”

“Oh, I won't get tired of ye,” Jeff answered quietly. But nobody needed any assurances on that point after looking into Jeff's eyes and taking his hand. He was one of the friends to be counted on.

“Hope ye'll all come again, I do, I swan!” was the unexpected utterance of Uncle Isaiah, who had come in charge of one of the wagons. That was a compliment the fellows appreciated, and they gave Uncle Isaiah three cheers.

“Now the tents are down, Horace's road up the ledge sticks out like a sore thumb,” Ned Harriott remarked.

“We'll have to come over once in awhile and go up there,” Chapin answered. Somehow Mains caught Josie's eye as this was said, and he nodded, as if to add, “We, too.”

“All ready, boys,” Jeff said at length. But then Captain Jack leaped on a rock beside which he had been standing, and signalled for attention.

“Three times three and a tiger, first, for the fellow who made the camp, and has done most to make this fortnight pleasant!” he cried. “All whoop her up, now, for Jeff Bussey!”

Jeff got his cheers, rousers, and with extras added. He took off his hat and looked around at the crowd with that slow, wise smile of his.

Then, as he glanced up the ledge toward the staff the boys had set up, his face sobered into earnestness.

“ I'll keep the flag a-flyin', boys! ” he said.

CHAPTER XIX

TO ENTERTAIN THE FAT BOY'S FAMILY

It was not in the fat boy's nature to brood over accidents or mistakes, but the failure of the Hemperor of the Hatmosphere to accomplish all he had hoped was a severe blow to him. He missed the camp, Four Corners and Huncle Hisaiah, too, and for some days following the return to Millvale he was as nearly gloomy as his happy disposition would allow. But there came a day when a lad with a yellow envelope appeared at the gym; and January, who had been standing and gazing soberly at the wildcat, suddenly whooped and went up in the air as high as his weight permitted.

"'Ip, 'ip, 'ip, 'ooroar!" he cried, as the fellows turned to look in wonder. "Me bloomink family's a-comink Tuesday, ye know!"

Captain Jack went over to the delighted lad and shook hands with him heartily.

"Tuesday, eh?" Lorimer said. "Couldn't be better. I want to be one of the first to welcome your mother and James Henry and the rest, but if they were coming earlier I might be dis-

appointed, for I'm going to the mountains over Sunday.

"Got it all planned what you're going to do with your people — how you're going to entertain them?" Jack added. January smiled; apparently that didn't bother him a bit.

"That's heasy," he answered. "Heverythink'll be so different; the kids'll be going around with their mouths hopen, ye know. But Hi'd like to show ma a baseball game, and " — he lowered his voice a little — "Hi was a-wondering 'ow Royal Burr could 'elp hentertain them, ye know!"

"See here, January, don't you go to trying any experiments with the wildcat!" was Lorimer's anxious rejoinder. "Just begin by warning your little folks that he's a dangerous animal, and then be sure you let him alone yourself!"

"Hall right, sir." The fat boy was evidently disappointed, but he took it bravely. "Hi did think Hi'd turn 'im loose, so they could see as 'ow 'e could climb and jump, ye know —"

"Not on any account!" Lorimer interrupted, decisively. "We don't want a funeral on our hands. You shall have a baseball game, and we're going to give you a little reception and entertainment in the gym when — well, one of these evenings — but you let Royal Burr alone!"

January turned his back on the cage, as if to signify that he would.

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"Hi 'ope Miss May'll be 'ere!" he said, after a moment.

"She will. She and her mother are going to New Hampshire this morning, to stay a fortnight, but she's planned to come back for a day next week, entirely on your account."

It is doubtful if the fat boy realized all this meant. May purposed to break into her holiday and travel four hundred miles, spending more than fourteen hours on the cars, at the expense of as many dollars, in order that she might do him honour.

But January wasn't worrying about that or any similar thing, just at present. He was too busy. Busy with his preparations, from the moment when the telegram arrived; busier, after the family came, with carrying out the plans.

As Lorimer told the fat boy, about the time the telegram was received May went to Bethlehem, New Hampshire, to visit her Uncle George Burtis. Lorimer was a guest at the Burtis place over Sunday, and on Monday May returned to Millvale with him, solely that she might welcome January's family.

May and Jack reached town about 6 o'clock at night. The Joneses were a little ahead of them; and it was said that January had had his family over to see the diamond, the gym, and the wild-cat, before they had been in Millvale an hour.

To James Henry, who had already visited Mill-

vale, all this was an old story. To Mother Jones and her little daughter, everything was strange and not easily to be comprehended. But January's twin brothers, boys smaller than himself, were fascinated with what they saw, and promptly took possession.

There was little that they understood, but they had the spirit of explorers and they were willing to take chances in order to learn the uses of things. Within ten minutes Lou Mains had to rescue them from a shower-bath in one of the dressing-rooms. They had pulled the cord, failed to realize that they ought to let go, and were standing under the torrent, drenched, but smiling. It is needless to add that Lou also smiled.

From all accounts, the younger Joneses would have been willing to stay on the spot, but Ma Jones had to eat, so the fat boy allowed them to return to O'Brien's. Promptly at 7 o'clock, however, they were all back at the gym, and there, a little later, May and Jack found them.

James Henry bowed low to May, and then, his frank and manly face shining with pleasure, put out his hand to Captain Jack.

"I landed 'em all, you see!" he said. "'Ere's the whole family on the way to set up 'ousekeeping in British Columbia.

"Mother — " But January got ahead of him.

"Miss May, Hi'll make us hacquainted with me ma, and Hoscar Haugustus, and Halbert

Hedward, and me sister June!" he said, with great dignity, but all in a breath.

Mrs. Jones was a plump little woman, with soft blue eyes and a gentle manner, a woman who looked wonderfully young to be, as she had been, the mother of twelve — and a real mother, too, as everybody had found out long ago, from the way that January talked of her.

Of course everything in this country was novel to her yet, and the trip across the ocean had been a rather upsetting experience, and she hardly knew where she was or what to say; but May soon put her at her ease, and the little woman was very frank about her hopes and fears.

"I wish James 'Enry's 'ome was nearer the old one," she said. "But 'e wants his ma, and he's willing to do for the younger ones, and so 'e ought to 'ave his way —

"Hoscar Haugustus, dear!" she interrupted herself to call, "please go away from that — that houtrageous beast!" She meant the wildcat, which was just on the point of flashing out a paw and skinning the small boy from shoulder to elbow.

"January has brothers all over the world, he tells me," May observed.

"Yes, dear, you might well say that. The boys as comes between 'im and James 'Enry, five of 'em living, are two in Australia and two more in South Africa, and one in Hongkong,

China. Good boys they are, as all my children 'ave been, but they're not well-to-do, you know, so —

"Halbert Hedward, dear!" This was addressed to the other small boy, who had placidly perched on the top of the tallest ladder in the gym. "Be careful you don't fall and split your 'ead!"

"Those two are twins?" May asked.

"Yes, dear, and they're near eight. Junie, the only girl amongst twelve, ten living and two dead, and my youngest, she's over five."

"She's the honly sister Hi've got, ye know!" January explained, pointing at the little girl, who was agreeably busy with the first corn-ball she had ever eaten.

"But you've got brothers, dear," his mother reminded him. In fact, she did not dare take her eyes from his brothers, the twins, who were investigating, one after another, all the dangerous places in the gym; and when she saw that Halbert Hedward was perseveringly endeavouring to find a way to get up on the trapeze, with Hoscar Haugustus starting to walk the railing around the gallery, she threw up her hands, as it were.

"January," she said, "don't you want to take your little brothers outdoors, dear? If they're playing hon the ground, they can't fall hoff, don't you know!"

"It pleases us to know that January may remain here in Millvale," May suggested. "We

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have grown very fond of him, and we think we can help him to make a good start in life."

The little mother viewed her with shining eyes.

"I know 'ow kind you've been to 'im," she answered. "Oh, yes, I know! If I was a — a millionairess, I wouldn't 'ave any excuse to take 'im away from Millvale."

From time to time, as the boys dropped into the gym, Jack or Lou Mains or James Henry himself brought them up and introduced them to the mother; and, not to omit the old boys, Seth Lanard appeared, when the evening was half over, and went at James Henry as if he wanted to hug him.

"Glad to see ye, James Henry, I am, by gum!" he roared. "Now where's that good mother of yours? I'm proud to meet ye, Mis' Jones! He's a fine boy, January is, and we couldn't get along without him!"

"What ye goin' to do for these folks, to make it pleasant for 'em, hey?" he added, as Captain Jack came near.

"We're going to play a game of ball, at January's request, so that his mother can see what it's like," Lorimer answered, smilingly. "That'll be to-morrow afternoon. To-morrow evening comes the exhibition you and January arranged, and January himself has planned the programme for Thursday and Friday. Saturday, our friends

are going to the country, to Jeff Bussey's place, out at Four Corners."

"We'll try to give ye a good time," Mr. Lanard said. He spoke to James Henry, but his fascinated gaze was on the twins, who were risking their eyes and limbs in front of the wildcat's cage. "Your mother will want to take it easy for a day or two, but we'll make things just as lively as ye want, for the rest of ye."

That was superfluous, however. As Mr. Lanard and the others soon found, the Jones twins, unaided, could make things lively.

CHAPTER XX

FROM BASEBALL TO PYROTECHNICS

HAVING shown her friendliness as clearly as any one could, by coming back to Millvale to meet January's mother, May returned to Bethlehem. Captain Jack put May on board the train at Boston, with the wish that either she was not going or that he was going too, and then hurried back to Millvale, to get together his teams for the exhibition game of ball which January had been so anxious for his mother to see.

It was easy enough to make up the nines, of course. In fact, they were all made up when January came around, in a shame-faced fashion, and made an extraordinary request. One of his little brothers, Hoscar Haugustus, wanted to play!

"Has he ever seen a game of baseball?" Lorimer inquired, doing his best to hide a laugh.

"Well, 'e saw some scrub hout 'ere yesterday hafternoon," January answered. "It's a 'igh hold game, 'e says, and 'e wants to be in it, ye know. 'E says 'e can play, ye know!"

"Think he'd have sense enough to dodge if

somebody happened to hit a hot liner his way? ” Captain Jack went on.

“ Of course ’e wouldn’t dodge! ” January said, rather wrathfully. “ ’E’d try to stop the ball. If Hi thought ’e’d dodge, H’d skin ’im alive, blow me! ”

Lorimer chuckled at that. But, though he sympathized with the fat boy’s feelings, it didn’t alter the fact that Oscar Augustus would be running a risk.

“ I don’t know about this, January,” he said. “ I’d like to please your little brother, of course, but I’m afraid he might get his head knocked off, going into a game he knows nothing about. Suppose you see what your mother says. If she’s willing to take chances — ”

“ Ho, yus, she’s been a-taking ’em hever since the twins were born,” was the placid reply. “ You put ’im in at short — that’s the position Hi’m a-going to play, ye know, hafter Hi’ve trained down — and Hi bet you ’e plays a bloomink fine game, what! ”

And, seeing that Ma Jones didn’t object, and the players seemed to think it a great joke, Captain Jack put Oscar Augustus down for shortstop of his own nine, earnestly hoping that nothing would happen to him.

Behold, therefore, Ma Jones occupying the best seat in the grand stand, with James Henry on one side of her and June Jones and Albert Edward

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on the other — James Henry being there to tell her what it was all about.

Lorimer's nine went into the field, Oscar Augustus, who was proportionately as short as January, though by no means as stout, looking like a minnow among whales. Tom Bell, who was captaining the other nine, went to the bat. And, as luck would have it, the first ball he reached for went down to the little Jones boy.

January danced up and down and yelled frantic messages as Tom started for first.

"Hi, hi, stop it, Hoscar Haugustus!" he cried. "Stop it and slam it hinto first! Good stop! Up to first now — the white-'eaded feller with the long nose! 'Urry hup! Get a move hon!"

It was a grounder of the deceptive sort that was sent to Oscar Augustus. It didn't look to be travelling very fast, and, judging its direction very well, he stooped over, put his hands together scoop fashion, fingers to the earth, and waited for the ball to come in.

It came, but he wasn't quite prompt enough in closing on it. The ball just walked up his sleeve, caught him on the nose and dropped to the ground again.

Oscar Augustus clutched his nose with one hand and the ball with the other, and looked around to see what he should do. Tom Bell was taking chances and had come halfway to second. The boy remembered what January said, and took it

to mean that he should throw the ball to the first man, the nearest. That was Reed, who was standing over against second bag, signalling frantically. Oscar Augustus put it to him, and just in time.

"Hout! Runner's hout!" January roared, dancing up and down again. "You 'elped put a man hout, Hoscar Haugustus! Bully for you! Do it some more!"

Ma Jones looked down anxiously on the diamond.

"I 'ope little brother didn't forget his manners when he 'elped put a man out, as January says!" she murmured. James Henry grinned.

"Oh, no, ma, it's all in the game," he answered, soothingly. "He did very well."

There was not so much to be said for Oscar Augustus's batting, when his turn came. Ben Cashman, who was pitching for the other nine, gave him the easiest ones he knew how to put over the plate, but they were moving too swiftly for a novice to gauge, and whenever the Jones boy reached for one it proved to have just gone by.

"Why doesn't 'e 'it it, James Henry?" Ma Jones wanted to know.

"Because he can't, ma," the eldest son explained. "The fellow who throws the ball tries to throw so the batter can't hit."

"I don't think that's fair!" Ma Jones said, firmly. "Why, Hoscar Haugustus wants to 'it

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it! See! I'm 'most afraid 'e'll 'urt 'imself!" And she leaned forward and called to the small boy at the plate.

"Don't strain yourself with reaching, Hoscar Haugustus, dear!" she cried.

Of course all the fellows had to grin at that, though they concealed it pretty well. James Henry chuckled.

"Never you worry, ma. He's all right," he said.

He was all right, anyway, when next it came his turn, for Ben Cashman was bound he should get a hit, for the sake of the spectator up there in the grand stand, and he aimed at Hoscar Haugustus's bat. At the third attempt he struck it, and the ball dropped in front of the plate and rolled a few feet toward his box, while Oscar Augustus, yelled at by January, sprinted away.

"Now you're off!" January roared. "Right down to the long-legged feller with the big ears! (This was Elverton, at first.) You can beat it! Go it, Hoscar Haugustus! Run, 'op, jump, fly, slide! You're safe!"

He was, indeed, for Cashman meant him to be, and was laughing so hard that he reached for the ball two or three times before he managed to pick it up. And when next he put it over, Ned Harriott contributed a passed ball for the benefit of the base-runner, and, with the help of that, January coached Oscar Augustus up to third.

Of course James Henry saw through the plot, and it amused as well as pleased him; but his mother, though she did not realize just what was happening, got rather excited as she watched her son's progress.

"What's 'e doing it for, James 'Enry?" she asked. "There's no one a-chasing 'im!"

"He's running to get in."

"Get in what?"

"If he comes clear around to where he started from, it counts one for 'is side," James Henry explained.

Meanwhile, with Oscar Augustus on third, Captain Jack had gone to the bat.

"'It 'er hout, Mr. Lorimer, sir!" entreated January. "Hoscar Haugustus will score if you do, you know!

"Hall ready, now, Hoscar Haugustus!" he called to his brother. "When 'e 'its 'er hout, you start!" And as Lorimer did hit her out, Oscar Augustus tore up the baseline as if a thousand fiends were after him, to where January waited to welcome him proudly and pat him on the back.

"Is that the hend of the game, James 'Enry?" demanded Ma Jones, excitedly.

"Oh, no."

"Then I want to see Hoscar Haugustus do it again!" she added; and, leaning forward, she sent her voice over the diamond once more.

"Hoscar Haugustus, I want you to do it again!" she called.

Of course this was good for another round of smiles and stifled laughter, in which James Henry joined, as he explained:

"He couldn't do it anyway, until his turn comes, ma."

Yet there were other things Oscar Augustus could do — because he didn't know any better — and he did one of them in the next half, when Horace White was trying to make third.

On a line hit, which was not a very savage one, the ball got into the Jones boy's hands just as Horace passed him. The few things Oscar Augustus had learned about the game mixed in his mind, then and there.

He had understood that the ball ought to get ahead of the base-runner. He had heard, also, that the base-runner ought to be touched by the ball. On the spur of the moment he couldn't quite see how to reconcile these two requirements, so he carried out the easiest one. When Horace was not more than ten feet away, Oscar Augustus let drive the ball with all his might. It took Horace in the small of the back.

What with surprise and shock, White gasped, and almost stopped; but of course after a second of hesitation he put on speed again and got in the run.

"Say, Tom, this isn't baseball, it's man-

slaughter!" he remarked to Bell, as he went back to the bench and started to rub the sore place.

"Oh, well, as long as she sees the small boy busy doing something, Ma Jones will think it's a great game, and we're out to amuse her, you know," Tom answered, calmly. "Let Oscar Augustus take an axe, if he wants to."

But it is only fair to the Jones twin to say that this was his last bad break. January's coaching helped straighten out his ideas, and he kept a sharp eye on everybody's work, and by the time the game ended he had a pretty clear notion of at least what not to do.

And his side won, 11 to 10, so of course Ma Jones was pleased with the pastime, and thought her son a wonderful player.

"But don't 'urry so, when you play again, Hoscar Haugustus," she said, as the perspiring youth came back to tell her all about it. "You could finish the game to-morrow, you know."

Ma Jones must have been thinking about cricket — and overlooking the propensities of small boys; for, where the twins were concerned, it seemed doubtful, many times a day, whether they would ever see "to-morrow."

Yet the baseball game had afforded Oscar Augustus an opportunity to let off steam, and he was willing to be reasonably quiet for the remainder of the day. Albert Edward was yet to be heard from, however; and since he was capable

of almost anything, from roosting at the top of the flagpole to dynamiting the gym, he was placed in charge of January, under strict orders; and at the cost of much physical and mental strain, the fat boy kept his brother alive until night.

There were "great doings" planned for that evening. It had been January's own idea to have a display of fireworks for part of the welcome to his family, and Mr. Lanard, to whom he first mentioned it, had thought a minute, laughed, and then sent his agent to the city in company with the fat boy to select an assortment. January had five dollars to spend, and he wondered at the quantity he got. If he had known how much Mr. Lanard quietly added to that sum, he would have wondered less.

It was so large and elaborate an assortment that the dealers sent out a man to handle it. He set up his frames and stands at the foot of the diamond, with things so arranged that the rockets would fall in the vacant lots on the other side of the street; and, as darkness deepened, Ma Jones and her family, together with a good many of the girl friends of the club and not a few of the members, took seats in the grand stand.

A rocket soared into the air like a line of living flame and left behind a trail of golden dust. A bomb ascended, burst with a tremendous report

and released a shower of stars. A Roman candle discharged its many-coloured burden — and then Ma Jones discovered that Albert Edward was missing.

He had been right at her side a minute before, so it didn't seem as if he could have gone far. But Albert Edward was active and enterprising, like his twin, and though Ma Jones had learned by experience that it was no use to worry about him, she wondered, as she watched the show, what kind of mischief he had started to get into.

Albert Edward wouldn't have put it that way. He wasn't in mischief. He had just gone over to help the man set off the fireworks.

So small was Albert Edward, and so noiseless his movements, that the fireworks man didn't realize he had an assistant until all of a sudden a rocket whizzed by his ear. He jumped, of course. Then he turned around suddenly, to see a boy holding a lighted taper dangerously near a box of Roman candles.

"Quit, you brat!" he yelled. "Here, gimme that and get out!"

"I want to do some!" was Albert Edward's firm reply. He stepped just out of reach, and the fireworks man, as he glared at the wiry figure, had a suspicion that if it came to a chase he wouldn't be so easy to catch.

"Hold that light away, confound you!" he roared. Albert Edward sidestepped again. The

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fireworks man was just on the point of making a rush to disperse the intruder, when it occurred to him that an easier way would be to make use of him.

The next feature on the programme was what they poetically called "the charge of the light brigade." It was nothing more than a flight of rockets, but it was necessary that all the rockets should be set off at once, and here the boy could help. The fireworks man motioned him forward.

"Say, you can light these, if you'll be careful," he said. "No, not yet! Jiminey crickets, kid, look out for that torch! When I count three and say 'Now,' you just run your light along this row, see?"

Albert Edward nodded. His eyes were shining as he looked over toward the sombre mass of the grand stand and thought how proud ma would be if she could see him now!

"All ready?" said the fireworks man. "One, two, thr— Great Jupiter, kid, what'd you set fire to that time?"

It was Albert Edward's own knickerbockers that were burning, where he had absent-mindedly swung the torch against them; but he calmly slapped at the odorous sparks until there was nothing left but a bad smell, and stood at attention again.

"We'll have another try," said his instructor. "All ready? One, two, three, now!" A double

line of rockets charged up into the air, and the sound of applause rolled out from the grand stand.

“You did noble, kid!” was the fireworks man’s verdict. “Now you may light that one, if you want.” And he pointed out another piece.

Thus for twenty minutes or more Albert Edward danced from one place to another, touching off the pieces as the man set them up, and having a lovely time. He was decorated with dirt and burns and bruises, he was dog-tired, and he didn’t even have time to glance toward the grand stand people he was working so hard to amuse, but he wouldn’t have changed his place for a kingdom.

And then, all of a sudden, while he was thinking what fun it was, somehow his grip relaxed, and his torch dropped into the box of Roman candles!

“Down on your face, kid!” yelled the fireworks man, as he flung himself flat. Albert Edward dropped.

Then the candles got busy. Some of them sputtered and thudded against the box. Some evidently ascended, as they were meant. One sent a ball through Albert Edward’s hair, and another ball — judging by the language — raked the back of the fireworks man’s neck. There was a warm time for a minute or two. When it was all over, the fireworks man rose to his feet with a sigh of relief.

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"I guess that'll about do you, kid," he said. "Here, you may light this — lay it so-fashion — and then start for home." Albert Edward lighted it.

Now the thing had been headed away from him as he put it down, but as he stood off a little one side to watch it, it suddenly flopped around on the grass and started toward him. He took another step to one side and stared with fascinated eyes.

It moved again! He turned toward the grand stand, looking over his shoulder. The thing had made another twist, and was coming after him with increased speed. Every time he dodged, it seemed to meet his movements.

Albert Edward had never seen a "nigger-chaser." That was why his eyes began to pop out — why his leisurely movements changed to a fast walk, and then to a run — and why at last, bellowing with rage and terror, he fairly flew over the ground to reach the protection of Ma Jones.

CHAPTER XXI

TOM, DICK, GLADYS, AND A MISTAKE

ON Thursday the Joneses enjoyed day fireworks, so to speak, at January's expense. That is to say, he loaded his mother and the three younger children into a double-seated carriage, and showed them everything of interest in Millvale and Doverdale — treating them to lavish refreshments along the way.

Besides exhibiting the two cities to them, he exhibited them to the two cities; in Doverdale, stopping his disgusted horse every five minutes in order to summon some athlete forward and introduce the family, and in Millvale taking them to make several calls. Jeff Bussey would be in Millvale on the next day, and on Saturday he would take the Joneses back to the farm.

With pleasure Lorimer also looked forward to his arrival, since Jeff was about the only real "stand-by" he would have in the school — so far as could be told at present. And when Bussey did come to town, bright and early Friday morning, he took hold of affairs with a vigour and intelligence that showed how valuable he would be.

"Terry's in Boston, you say? Well, then, let's hunt up Tom Bell," Jeff suggested. "Tom was always a good friend to boys in our lower classes, same as you've been, and likely enough he'd be able to remind us of material he's had an eye on — fellows worth workin' with, who didn't come out for athletics last year because, maybe, there was such a crowd of us."

"Good idea, Jeff! We'll see him right away," Lorimer answered. But, as he soon discovered, the meeting would have to be postponed. Tom had borrowed an auto belonging to a cousin of his and gone off alone for a little spin.

Alone! Lorimer wondered, when he heard that; and yet the explanation was simple enough. Tom was planning to loaf along the road, get into Roxbridge about dark, and invite Marion Woodside and her aunt — not that he cared particularly about the aunt! to ride with him.

Unfortunately, that was not Tom's lucky day. He had a break-down before he had gone very far, wasted more than an hour in tinkering the motor so it would run, and then, to add to his perplexities, got "turned round" and lost his way.

It was some time before he realized he was lost, and then the matter was made worse by two fellows of whom he asked directions, and who, either unintentionally or deliberately, headed him wrong. Twilight was drawing near when he finally pulled up at the side of the road, opposite

the entrance to a large estate, and, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, pondered his next move.

The easiest course would be to return to Millvale. When he got to Roxbridge, it might be too late to call on Marion. But Tom was the kind of fellow whose spine begins to stiffen when he meets an obstacle, and he made up his mind pretty promptly that, having started for Roxbridge, he would reach Roxbridge "or bust."

He glanced across the road. Then he sent his auto over, well out of the highway. The people in a house like that which he saw at the end of the drive owned every kind of turnout, of course, and he would throw himself on their sympathy as a fellow traveller, and find out exactly where he was and how to get where he wanted to go.

The double gate in the carriage drive seemed to be locked; but back a little distance was a smaller gate swung invitingly open upon a path for foot passengers. Tom walked in.

Not very far, however. Hardly was he inside the gate when two men who had evidently been lying concealed behind the hedge flung themselves upon him. They dealt no blows. Apparently all they wanted was to capture him. But Tom didn't stop to thank them for that. Taken by surprise though he was, he struck out with hands and feet, and all three went down together.

"Hold his legs!" one of the assailants gasped to the other. "I've got his arms."

That wasn't quite true. But just as he spoke he did get one, or rather the fist at the end. It took him in the jaw and shut his teeth upon his tongue with a force that almost clipped off the end of it.

With a growl of rage and pain, the fellow once more hurled himself forward. This time he planted himself on Tom's chest.

"Say, see here!" the other muttered. "We had our orders not to hurt you, just bring you into the house so the boss could look you over and talk to you about Miss Gladys; but if you want to be knocked out first, why, you can be, see?"

"Who do you think I am?" Tom asked.

"Who? Why, you're the bloke that had it all framed up to run off with Miss Gladys to-night and marry her. Old Marlow's caught on."

Tom chuckled, chuckled so hard that the fellow who was sitting on his chest looked down at him in surprise.

"See here, boys," Tom said, "you've made a mistake, but since you're trying to do your duty, as you understand it, I don't feel like rowing with you. All you want is that I should go up to the house and meet the boss kidnapper himself? Very well, let's go!"

"No quick punch and no break-away on the road?" said one of his captors, suspiciously.

"Not any! Hold my arms, if you want to," was Bell's cheerful answer.

And it was in that fashion, with a husky farm-

hand gripping each arm, that Tom was ushered into the presence of Mr. Edward Marlow, a fat, red-faced, white-haired old fellow, who was ramping up and down his dining-room more like a crazy man than a solid citizen. Nor was his temper improved by the smile with which Bell surveyed him.

"So you're the scoundrel, eh?" he roared. Tom shook his head.

"No such name on my visiting-card," he said. "Whom do you expect to see, if I may ask?"

"Aren't you a fellow named Somers — the villain my silly daughter planned to run away with to-night?"

Tom shook his head. But old Marlow still glared at him suspiciously.

"I don't believe you!" he shouted.

"Jane!" he yelled in the same breath. He touched the bell, and a maid came in, so promptly that it seemed she must have been listening at the keyhole.

"Jane," he ordered, "take this key, unlock the door of Miss Gladys's room, and ask her to come to the dining-room for a moment.

"Now, young man!" he added, with a venomous glance at Tom. "We'll see what your deluded victim has to say. If I've made a mistake — well, I'll consider that, when the times comes. If I haven't — you may prepare yourself for a sound horsewhipping!"

Tom bowed politely. The smile was still on his face, and the longer old Marlow watched him the wilder he got.

It was quite dark by this time. The curtains had been drawn and the lamps lighted just as Tom was brought in, and while the master of the house clumped around the room, scowling at everything and everybody, he suddenly had an idea.

"Stand the villain over there, where he'll be in the light when the girl opens the door," he said to his men. "Turn him loose — I mean, stand away from him. There's no fear he'll escape until we're ready to let him."

Tom laughed. He was enjoying the whole thing immensely.

"Oh, don't worry about me," he said as the men moved away. "I shall be delighted to be exhibited to your daughter — Miss Gladys, I think you said? — and, happily, I can allow you time to make apologies afterward. I had intended to go to Roxbridge, but —"

"Yes, I know you had," the old man snarled. "The letter I intercepted told me that. But I don't think my daughter will go with you!"

"Ah, here she is!" he added. "Well, young woman, you see I caught the rascal who undertook to marry you without consulting me! Anything to say about it?"

The newcomer was a very pretty girl. There was frank admiration in Tom's eyes as they

rested upon her charming face and dainty figure. But it was only a blank and puzzled stare that she turned upon him.

Suddenly, however, her expression altered. A look of deepest grief overspread her face. To Bell's intense amazement, she ran over and threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Dick, Dick!" she sobbed. "Be brave, for my sake!" And then, as if overcome by emotion, she rushed from the room.

Old Marlow chuckled. The young man was staring after her as if stupefied.

"She couldn't very well help identifying you, you know," the old man said. "Since she has done so, it's hardly worth while to tell any more lies, is it? I think we may as well proceed to the main feature of the entertainment. Give me the horsewhip, Jotham!"

Then Tom waked up. He seized a heavy oak chair and swung it once or twice to get the "feel" of it.

"You old ass!" he cried. "I don't know what your daughter's game is, but I suspect, and I hope she wins it! My name is no more Dick Somers than yours is. I'm Thomas Henderson Bell, of 65 Woodlawn Street, Millvale, and I stopped at your gate, worse luck, to ask about the road to Roxbridge. There's my memorandum book, with my name on the fly-leaf, and there are half a dozen letters." He flung them on the table.

"Now come on with your horsewhip, if you think you'd better!" he added, savagely. "I warn you, though, there'll be some heads broken before you strike me with it!" And he backed to a position where it would be hard to "rush" him, and gave his weapon a warning twirl.

The old man looked from Tom to the letters, and from the letters back at Tom. Finally he put out a hand and turned over the heap, and read the addresses. Then he took another look at Tom, and coughed nervously.

"I — I — Is it possible that — But why should my daughter call you 'Dick'?" he stammered.

Tom laughed scornfully. "Aren't you smart enough to guess?" he retorted.

Old Marlow meekly shook his head.

"If she made you think that I was her lover," Tom explained, "nobody would bother to watch her, since I was under guard. Understand the situation, now?"

"No."

"Then she could use the opportunity to keep her appointment with Dick Somers," Tom added, with a cheerful grin. "I hope she did!"

Old Marlow went into the air like a jumping-jack.

"Jane!" he roared, "see if my daughter is in her room. If she isn't, go over the house, and if you find her, lock her up. Jotham, search the

grounds. Berry, put Busy Bee to the light buggy and Midas to the sulky, and bring them both around."

But the servants moved very slowly, so slowly that it seemed they must be in sympathy with their young mistress. Berry, in fact, did not move at all.

"You know the hosses ain't fit to take out, either of 'em, Mr. Marlow," he said. "I told you yesterday that Bee was lame, and Midas cast a shoe when you had him out this afternoon."

Another spell of stamping and roaring followed, part of it being due to Jane, who returned to report that Miss Gladys was nowhere in the house. Tom interrupted when the racket became tiresome.

"Any objection to my attending to my own business, now?" he asked.

The old man turned and stared, as if he had forgotten a stranger was present. Very likely, so upset was he, that was actually the case. But as he gazed an eager light flashed into his eyes.

"How did you come here? What conveyance had you?" he demanded.

"I had an auto — which has probably been stolen or smashed by this time," Tom answered.

"You see my difficulty," old Marlow went on rapidly. "I want to pursue my daughter and fetch her back. I must act at once. I will make

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ample amends for your detention, only lend me or sell me your car! ”

“ I'll see you hanged first! ” was Tom's reply.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BEST MAN OF THE ELOPERS

OLD Marlow didn't seem to comprehend that Tom's refusal was seriously meant. He was used to having his own way, and he stared as if he doubted the evidence of his ears.

"I — I say I'll buy your car!" he repeated.

"You haven't money enough!" Tom answered as he strode toward the door. "If I felt like mixing in the mess at all, I should be more inclined to help a girl get away from a wild man like you!"

Instantly the master of the house struck out on a new tack.

"Jotham! Berry!" he bellowed. "Run to Mr. Crosby's and Mr. Whipple's and borrow any kind of turnout they'll lend! Jane, tell Mr. William to come to me at once! Hurry, all of you!"

Tom passed in the hall, as he went out, a tall young man who had a look of the girl, and was probably Marlow's son. But though young Marlow glanced curiously at the stranger, he did

not speak. No one barred Tom's departure, and, reaching the place where he had left his auto, he found, to his satisfaction, that no one had meddled with that. He jumped in and made ready to start.

"Hey! Hey! Mr. Bell! Hold on a minute!"

It was the voice of one of the men who had captured him, and, looking back, Tom saw two shadowy figures running down the path from the house. He seized a big wrench and put himself on the defensive.

"Hello! Hunting more trouble?" he said, sharply.

"No, sir. Just want to tell you we're sorry for our share of the muss," was Jotham's answer, as he and Berry came forward.

"You said you wanted the road to Roxbridge?" he went on. "Well, we can help you. Keep on as you're going for about a mile. The road forks at a big red barn that sets close to it, and then you turn to the left. And say! If you meet Miss Gladys and her young man, tell 'em we wish 'em luck!"

"Yes, you've been acting like it!" Tom rejoined, grimly.

"Now, don't you make any mistake about that," Jotham argued. "If you'd turned out to be Mr. Somers instead of Mr. Bell, I cal'late you and the girl would have got away just the same. We'd fixed it with Jane. But we want to pretend

to stand in with the old man, as far's we can, because he pays good wages, and in most ways he ain't a bad boss, see? "

" I see," laughed Tom. " It's all right, so far as I'm concerned, and good-bye to you."

The moon was rising. It would be lighter, pretty soon, and in every way a delightful evening, and he began to hope he might get to Roxbridge in time at least to speak to Marion, even if it was too late for their ride.

Feeling pretty sure of his road, now, he sent the auto at good speed. The mile to the forks was soon covered; he made the turn to the left, and had gone perhaps a couple of miles in the new direction, when a light that seemed to be stationary caused him to slow up.

Apparently there had been an accident. A carriage was overturned at the side of the road, and the horse, still snorting and trembling, was hitched to a tree near by. A young man was busy about the wreck. A young woman stood watching.

" Hello! " Tom sang out. " Anything I can do for — "

Then he stopped short, partly from surprise and in part from resentment, for as she came within range of his headlight he saw that the young woman was old Marlow's daughter, the girl who, by hailing him as " Dick," had very nearly got him horsewhipped.

She recognized him also, a minute later. Blushing rosy red, she turned to her companion.

"Dick," she murmured, "I think this is the gentleman I — I — Oh, I told you about it!" she ended, desperately. "Will you apologize for my — my action and — and —"

Dick Somers laughed as he came forward, holding out his hand. He was a clean-cut young fellow, with an open, honest face, and the sincere and hearty manner that makes friends, and Tom took to him at once.

"My name's Somers," he said. "I purpose to marry this young lady — provided we ever get to Roxbridge! I think you'll pardon the deception she practised at your expense, when you understand how serious the situation was.

"In the first place, there's my business card, to prove I'm no adventurer. Every member of Miss Marlow's family, brother and all — everybody but her father — approves of her marriage to me. Her father has a theory that women shouldn't marry before the age of thirty, and because of that notion, nothing else, he shut her up and refused to hear a word from me. Fact is, he's never even seen me. I'm entirely opposed to elopements, or anything that isn't open and aboveboard, but Miss Marlow's health was suffering from her imprisonment — that was what it amounted to — and when we found that her father's own brothers and sisters couldn't

make him listen to reason, I told them I was going to take her away. Thanks to you," he added, with a laugh, "I've got her so far!"

Tom laughed in his turn.

"Glad to have been of any assistance," he said, "and I forgive Miss Marlow, freely. But what's gone wrong? Wheel off?"

"Yes," Somers answered, ruefully. "Hard luck to have it happen here — not a house within two miles!"

"Better come in with me," Tom suggested. "I'm going to Roxbridge, if I don't lose my way again. Probably we can meet some one you can send back to take care of your team. Better risk it than get caught, anyhow. I doubt if anybody but the old man will try very hard to stop you — but he might!"

"By the way, Tom added, "my name's Bell — Tom Bell, of Millvale."

Somers offered his hand again and introduced Tom to Miss Marlow.

"It'll be kind of you to give us a lift, Mr. Bell," the young man said, gratefully. "And," he added, as he glanced backward over the long, level road, "we may be needing it right now. See the carriage light back there? That may be my future father-in-law! Jump in, Gladys, and we'll trust Mr. Bell to keep ahead of him!"

In another moment the auto was off and away. It was likely enough that, as Somers suggested,

old Marlow was already in pursuit, and there was more than an even chance that that was his carriage. But of course it stood no chance against the auto. They lost it at the next turn, and it stayed lost, and without further threat or dread they got into Roxbridge and drew up at the home of the clergyman with whom Somers had made an appointment.

"I say, Bell, you'll have to see me through with this!" the young man cried, as he lifted his sweetheart from the car. "There'll be some of Gladys's cousins inside — if they haven't got tired of waiting and gone home — but you've had more to do with this event than anybody else, and I want you to stand up with me!"

"Heavens and earth, man, I've been on the road half the afternoon, and I'm inch-deep in dirt!" Tom protested. But Somers caught hold of him and pulled him out.

"I'm not wearing any dress suit myself!" he said. "Take off your coat and goggles and gloves, and wash your face, if it'll make you feel better, but don't go back on me now; there's a good fellow!"

And the end was that Tom allowed himself to be persuaded, and followed the elopers inside. The cousins, three girls of Miss Marlow's age, were there, and when they had heard the whole story were anxious to make a hero of Tom; and, though he declined to allow that, he had the pleasantest kind of time, from the moment of his arrival

until the ceremony was over and they were ready to go.

"Where to?" he asked, hackman fashion, when he had congratulated Mr. and Mrs. Somers, as he believed he could do with a clear conscience. "I'm the official chauffeur for this occasion, you know!"

"If you will persist in being good to us, old man, you may take us to the New Grand," Somers answered, with a laugh. "Sure you haven't business of your own that you want to attend to?"

"Nothing now," was Tom's reply.

Indeed, it seemed too late to get a glimpse of Marion, and there was no hope of it in his mind when, after he had left the newly married pair at the hotel, he drove slowly through the quiet street in which the Woodsides lived. But fortune favoured, after all his trials and delays, for as he neared the house another auto shot up to the curb, and Judge Woodside, descending, handed out his daughter.

The judge liked Tom — and he wanted to smoke a cigar — so he settled himself at one end of the piazza and waved the young people over to the other end, and granted them and himself a long half-hour. In that time the story of Tom's queer adventure was told; and, so long as Tom had been able to help Dick Somers and his bride, Marion professed that she sacrificed her own ride willingly.

CHAPTER XXIII

WILL AND HIS FATHER UPSET THINGS

SPEAKING of sacrifices, it was on that same evening that May Roxton, surprised that her piazza seemed for once deserted by the boys and girls, said to Captain Jack, "Where is everybody, I wonder?" and Lorimer laughed as he replied.

"I know where my Van Dusen boy is," he said. "He's in bed, sleeping hard, so he can get up between 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning."

"How is he getting along?"

"Nobly! He's going to be a credit to us. The little fellow has every temptation to break training; he could stuff himself with all kinds of delicacies and live as softly as a prince; but, from all I can see and learn, he's sticking to plain fare and steady habits and —"

"And upsetting his whole family," May put in, mischievously.

"Well, yes, I suppose his training does rather break in on the routine of a house like that," Captain Jack admitted. "But why should they find fault, when they can fairly see the boy grow!"

The "why" was something that Lorimer was destined soon to learn.

A fortnight earlier, Mr. Van Dusen himself had been on the point of asking advice and help. The millionaire was growing stout, inconveniently so, and he had begun to think he would have to go into training.

Since that time he had had a severe attack of indigestion. While it lasted, he could almost see his flesh melt off. When it ended, he was feeling so much better that he decided he could avoid the disagreeable necessity of exercising and eating plain food.

But in those few days he was confined to the house he saw a good deal of Will's goings-on, and, though some only puzzled him, others made him angry. That was why on the next evening, early, he was looking for Captain Jack.

The ostensible reason for his call at the grounds was to give Lorimer a check in payment for one month's care of Will. Perhaps he had forgotten some of Lorimer's characteristics since the last time they met. At any rate, as the lad smilingly took the slip of paper and thanked him, Van Dusen growled:

"I am not altogether satisfied with Will's progress — at least with the manner of it. I am inclined to think that the annoyances to which it subjects us might be attained at less expense."

Lorimer's smile faded. He looked at the visitor steadily.

"Will you kindly explain yourself?" he asked.

And then Van Dusen's grievances came out in a heap.

"I refer to the ridiculous costumes he insists upon wearing — the unearthly hours at which he rises and retires — the extraordinary likes and dislikes in the matter of food, which keep my chef perpetually complaining — and — and — eh?"

The end came lamely and suddenly, because Lorimer was holding out the check he had just received.

"Surely you must see I can't accept this," Captain Jack said, steadily. "If the advantages of my work with Will do not greatly outweigh the trifles you speak of, the work isn't worth paying for, and I shall apologize and drop it here and now."

Mr. Van Dusen began to hedge.

"But I don't dispute its — its advantages," he sputtered. "Perhaps some modification in details —"

Lorimer smiled faintly and shook his head.

"As I understand it," he said, "Will is only following the system I marked out for him. He has gained five pounds in weight, has a good appetite and sleeps well, and is developing muscles, and I shall not advise him to make the slightest change in his manner of life. If you, as his father, choose to take that responsibility, you of course have the right."

"But — but —" Mr. Van Dusen began.

"I told him to alter the absurd semi-mannish style of dress that was choking and sweltering him. I told him when to get up and when to go to bed. I told him what he should eat and what he should not eat. I gave him precisely such instructions as I would give my own brother — though I doubt if my brother, or more than one boy in a thousand, would have stuck to them as Will has. He's entitled to all the more credit, as I look at it, if he's held his grip in spite of opposition at home. I'm the one to blame!"

The check still fluttered in the air between them. Mr. Van Dusen glanced at it and put his hands behind him.

"I think I must have expressed myself injudiciously," the millionaire said. "We value your work — there's no doubt the boy is the better for it — and I can't consent to your giving it up."

"You must consent — unless —"

"Yes? Unless what?"

"I told you at the beginning that if I took charge of Will's training there must be no interference with it," Lorimer answered. "It seems there has been criticism, if not open opposition, so now I'll go a little farther. If the training is to continue, you must back up the boy. He has no strength for fighting ignorant or impertinent meddlers."

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"Very well, very well," Van Dusen agreed. Then, as at last Lorimer folded the check and put it in his pocket, the man gave a sigh of relief.

"Have you any objection to our taking him away on the yacht for a fortnight or so?" Van Dusen asked, meekly.

"Certainly not. It will do him good. The main thing at present is that he shall stay outdoors, dress sensibly, get sleep enough and eat wholesome food. By the time snow comes he'll be in shape for real hard work that will develop him fast. A year from now you won't know him!"

"Think there's good stuff in him, eh?" the father said, proudly.

"Splendid! He's got nerve and pluck and the steadiness of purpose that keeps a fellow going, and all our boys are doing their best to help him."

Just at that moment Mr. Van Dusen happened to recall the half-formed intention of a fortnight before.

"I had a mind, a while ago, finding I was becoming uncomfortably stout, to ask you the easiest way to check that tendency," he confessed. Lorimer smiled.

"I'm afraid I don't know any way that you would consider easy," he answered. "One of the first things you would have to do would be to put away that auto and the carriages and walk.

"You have to work for health and strength,

just as you do for any other good thing," Lorimer went on, half to himself. "First place, you know, you have to choose whether you'll have 'em, or whether you'll have autos and wine and cigars and rich food. And after you've made your choice, — well, you can't get a \$10,000 touring car by sitting and wishing for it, and you can't get strong that way, either.

"Excuse me, sir," Lorimer ended suddenly, in some confusion. "I wasn't thinking of you, exactly, and I wouldn't say anything impertinent, you know. I was just muttering my thoughts without hitting at anybody."

"Never mind, my lad," was the millionaire's sober rejoinder. "You spoke the truth. A man doesn't come to my age without learning that, for everything he gets, something must be given up.

"To change to a pleasanter subject," he added, "do you need anything in your gymnasium?"

"No, sir, thank you."

As Lorimer spoke the words, Van Dusen looked at him curiously.

"Contented, are you?" he said.

"Why, yes, sir," was Captain Jack's smiling answer. "The gym's as good as we need, and better than we deserve, and I believe I haven't much to wish for just at present, except," he added laughingly, "well, except that January Jones's little brothers shall get out of the neighbourhood alive!"

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Of course Mr. Van Dusen did not think of taking that seriously. Actually, however, if there was any risk that the ingenuity of two small boys could devise, these two were sure to run it.

CHAPTER XXIV

AVENGERS ON OLD JARED'S TRAIL

THOUGH Tom Bell had thought that things were coming pretty swiftly during that auto trip of his, his experience was nothing to that through which Four Corners was passing — thanks to the Jones twins.

Please note that they were not bad boys, by any means. There wasn't an ounce of meanness under their skins, and they wouldn't wilfully have injured anybody in person, property, or feelings. But they were so full of life that they simply couldn't keep still, and they were bubbling over with originality, too, and bound to be doing "something different" every time, and naturally in the course of a day they covered a good deal of ground.

Arriving at the Bussey farm on Saturday afternoon, they had the place whirling round and round, so to speak, by bedtime. Then on Sunday morning, when all the visitors went to church with the Busseys, they introduced themselves to the community in general.

Albert Edward fell asleep and rolled off the

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seat. Never doubting that Oscar Augustus pushed him off, he arose and slapped his grinning twin. A minute later, both were down on the floor, and there they slammed each other around until James Henry tore them apart by main strength and dragged them outdoors, a twin in each hand. After that, the neighbours kept an eye on the Bussey place.

There were two odd things about the twins. Where January was rather talkative, they were inclined to be close-mouthed; and again, where January was anxious to be at peace with everybody who would let him, the twins fought each other all the time. Not that there was malice or temper in it; but, being of the same size, they wanted to find out who was the better fellow. It worried January, but he couldn't put a stop to it. It was too old and settled a habit of theirs.

Ever since they reached Millvale the twins had kept the fat boy busy, and here at Four Corners he was "more so," trying to invent ways to keep them out of mischief. Sunday afternoon, after Albert Edward had been rescued from the pigpen, where he was attempting to ride the largest hog, and after Oscar Augustus had been butted over a fence by the old ram, January took his brothers off to the river.

"Hi'm a-going to show you 'ow to swim," he said, "on condition as you never go in without letting of me know, and don't go in more nor

twice a day, or stay in more nor twenty minutes. Hunderstand? "

The twins looked at him and at each other, and nodded solemnly. January knew he could trust them — provided they didn't forget.

"Come hon, then," he said. "Hi don't like to break the Sabbath, ye know, but you two tykes will bloody well bust it, hany'ow, so 'ere goes for the river! "

What with getting there and back, dressing and undressing, and the swim itself, the river would take care of the twins for two hours a day. But there were so many hours left! Finally, however, Ma Jones noticed how hard January was working, and relieved him of some responsibility.

"Take it heasy, lad," she said, in her soft and gentle way. "Little brothers 'ave lived through it, so far. Hand it's no use to try and watch them — for because you can't, you know."

It was after he had received this bit of advice, which sank deep, that January had his biggest idea, and almost thought that everybody's troubles were over. He took the twins out to Bussey's Woods, where the Millvale boys had camped, and built them a tent of saplings and hemlock boughs.

"Honly don't set fires!" he said; and the twins promised that they wouldn't.

Monday had been a time of terror at the farm. Tuesday, with the twins at their camp, seemed

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like a foretaste of heaven. They were cheerful and contented, too. But by Wednesday things had grown a little tame, and they decided to enliven matters by playing Indian.

"We've got to paint hup and 'ave 'ead-dresses and carry weapons," suggested Oscar Augustus.

"Leave it to me," was the confident reply of Albert Edward.

It was Oscar Augustus, however, who provided the head-dresses — of twigs and feathers interwoven. Albert Edward got the paint, red and yellow and black, from the woodshed chamber, and he found the weapons also — an old musket that they could barely lift, Jeff's revolver and box of cartridges, and two carving-knives. With these they retired to the camp and proceeded to decorate.

According to the Indian tales they had read, lurid stories written for British youth by men who never saw an Indian, the red man in his native wilds doesn't wear much of anything but paint. They stripped to the waist, and Albert Edward painted Oscar Augustus and Oscar Augustus painted Albert Edward, face and body, and then, surveying each other, they grinned admiringly and joyously.

"My name's Heagle Wing," said Albert Edward.

"My name's Bear 'Unter," said Oscar Augustus.

"Brother, let hus take the trail, what?" said Eagle Wing, solemnly.

Dragging the old musket, which they took turns at carrying, they stole stealthily to the top of the ledge, with many a muttered "Hist!" and much expressive pantomime, and, breathing hard, dropped on their stomachs at last and looked down upon the home of old Jared Peabody.

"'E little knows the Avenger is on 'is track!" hissed Eagle Wing.

"Two Avengers, you mean!" said Bear Hunter, crossly.

"Talk Hindian, you!" growled Eagle Wing. He set the example by spouting a rigmarole in a hoarse whisper.

"The paleface is doomed! 'E must die!" was the conclusion of it. "Before the next sunrise 'is 'ome shall be hashes and 'is stalwart frame shall be — shall be dirt!" It said "dust," in the speech that Eagle Wing was trying to quote, but he forgot, and had to use the next best word.

"Hist! Let the braves hadvance — swift as the wind and secret as — as hanythink!" said Bear Hunter, in his turn. Sneaking down the ledge, away at the left of Horace White's road, the Indians were soon on level ground and moving toward the Peabody place.

On the ledge side, the shrubbery ran up pretty near Peabody's barn. It was rather a difficult road they had to traverse, indeed, and how they

got that old musket through the bushes without blowing their heads off, will always be a mystery. They did it, anyway; and, one with the gun and the other with the revolver, finally sank down behind the outer fringe of trees and bushes.

"To the heast, Heagle Wing! Me to the west!" whispered Bear Hunter. "When Hi raise me war-bonnet, let the thunderbolts speak to the paleface! Then sound the war-whoop and charge!"

They crawled three or four yards apart and a little nearer the barn. Slowly and solemnly Bear Hunter lifted his head-dress. In the next moment he pulled the trigger of the old musket and his twin let go the six shots in the revolver.

Then, with a yell supposed to be blood-curdling, Eagle Wing dashed out of the bushes. But Bear Hunter didn't follow, and, when he noticed that, the other twin turned back. Bear Hunter was lying flat on his back, blinking at the sun and bleeding from the nose.

"What's 'appened?" Eagle Wing demanded.

"'Ow should Hi know?" the wounded brave gasped, angrily. "Hi fell down — me arm 'urts!"

"You look 'orrid!" Eagle Wing observed.

What with blood and paint, Bear Hunter was indeed a fearsome sight. The old musket had kicked hard.

But as he feebly tried to turn, that he might

bury his swollen nose in the cooling turf, there arose such a tremendous racket in and about Peabody's barn that he stopped half-way and, leaning on his elbow, stared questioningly at his companion.

At the moment of the Indian attack old Jared had been milking his worst cow. She was a nervous cow, as well as an evil-tempered one, and when a charge of birdshot pattered against the barn, closely followed by six bullets, she simply drew off and kicked the old man as far as there was room to send him. And the milk-pail clattered after, the milk drenching the milker, and the pail coming down over his head as neatly as if he had planned to put it there.

Staggering to his feet, he groped for a rope that hung by the door and threw his weight upon it. There was a good-sized bell on the barn, for Mr. Peabody was mortally afraid of fire; and the bell, which pealed furiously at every twitch of the rope, was advertising to all the countryside that he wanted help.

"Help! Help!" He was beseeching it by word of mouth also. That didn't make much noise — the pail was still over his head, and he hadn't yet found out what ailed him — but he did his best.

By the time he got the pail off, the neighbours began to gather. And about that time Eagle Wing and Bear Hunter started to make back

tracks through the bushes. It looked as if their game might be turning serious.

Nobody noticed them. They got back to their camp undetected. Then, as if with one consent, they hurried up to the top of the ledge and looked over toward the Peabody place.

The dooryard was full, and people were still coming — most of them carrying water-pails. The hand-tub was there, and so were most of the members of the volunteer fire department, distinguishable by their red hats. Old Jared was hopping about like a pea on a hot griddle. It was doubtful if he realized the situation yet, but he was making a fuss, just the same.

"Let's go 'ave a swim," said Eagle Wing, with a sigh.

But the paint didn't come off in the river, though they scrubbed all they knew how. It gave them away, when they wofully sneaked home, and it kept on giving them away, for, in spite of turpentine, it took the rest of the week to wear off.

And their speckled faces and blistered bodies weren't the worst of it, for even gentle Ma Jones rose in her wrath at the thought of annoying a neighbour and startling the town. She made them go and apologize to Mr. Peabody, and then she asked James Henry to whip them — and watched to see that he put it on hard!

Jeff Bussey couldn't let the Indian game end

there. He named one of the twins "Yellow-hammer" and the other "Spotty-Nose," real Indian names, he said, and had a good deal of fun at their expense.

Yet the little fellows were fond of him, in spite of that, and he thought they were fine boys, and when he and the Joneses returned to Millvale, Thursday noon, Jeff was sorrow-stricken at the thought that they would be starting for the West the next day. That upset everybody, more or less, — though James Henry, as usual, found something brave and comforting to say.

"Cheer up! Cheer up!" he cried, as the last handshakes were being exchanged. "Next summer we'll 'ave January out to British Columbia to spend 'is vacation, and the next year ma and I and these three will be on 'ere, and postage stamps are cheap, you know, so we ain't a-going to lose track of each other or hany of our friends!"

And afterwards the boys did their best to help January through the remainder of the day — Captain Jack with a lesson in rowing, and Will Van Dusen with an auto ride, and Lou Mains with a boxing lesson. So Friday wore away, Saturday came, and with it came a couple that Tom Bell was amused and pleased to meet again — Mr. and Mrs. Dick Somers, the hero and heroine of the auto elopement.

"Hello, Bell!" Somers cried. "Told you I'd hunt you up! Wanted you to know that it's all

right! I called on my respected father-in-law the day after the wedding — and you see I'm alive yet! He was willing then to weigh my credentials, seeing that he couldn't help himself, and he seemed to be satisfied. Fact is, he wants us to come and live with him."

"And shall you go?" Tom asked.

Dick laughed and glanced at his pretty young wife, who smiled in her turn.

"Well, not just at present," he said. "Not until Gladys has had a rest, anyway. See here, we're fitting up a little place in Roxbridge, 17 Blank Street, and though we're frisking round just now, we'll be at home after the first of the month — and you'll have to come and see us, understand?"

"Of course I'll come," Tom answered. "Anything I can do now to make things pleasant here for you in Millvale?"

"Nothing, thank you. Everything is all right everywhere. Fact is, if I felt any better I couldn't stand it! Get married! Say, Bell, why don't you go to Roxbridge and get married?"

Tom gasped, choked as he tried to answer, turned very red, and, waving his hand desperately, ran for the dressing-room. That jesting remark of Somers's had come "near home." Marion Woodside lived at Roxbridge.

CHAPTER XXV

JANUARY AND OTHERS IN SCHOOL

IN one view of the case, the holidays did not come to an end when school began. Through September and October, while the classes were getting into their stride, so to speak, there would be no very hard work for anybody. Meanwhile there were times when Lorimer, for one, found it a little difficult to realize where he was. It was pleasant to be a senior. But how many familiar faces he missed!

May had finished her course. So had Rose Ahearn, Clare and Tom Bell, Terry McGrady, Ned Harriott, Matt Janvrin, Will Chapin, and a dozen other faithful friends. Jeff Bussey, now a junior, was about the only real chum who remained. Lorimer was older, or at any rate more mature, than most of his classmates, and though, as a junior, he had been president of his class, most of his closest friends had been seniors. Jim Elverton and Davis and Reed and Amos and a few other good fellows and promising athletes were in his class and were still with him; and yet, as he glanced over the yard, at intermission, he felt pretty lonesome.

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Imagine, then, the emotions of January Jones, beginner!

It must be confessed that January wanted to dodge, to put off the evil day, which meant the day when he should enter the River Street grammar school, as long as he could. Originally, Terry McGrady had planned to start Thursday on a little yacht cruise which the fat boy had been invited to join, and that would have brought the party home about Wednesday, just in time for the opening of the schools. But Terry had postponed the start until Monday, in order to take part in a baseball series with Doverdale, and, at this change, January chuckled gleefully. He would gain three days! He wouldn't have to begin school until the following Monday!

But there are worse things than school, and if January had paused to recall how sick he was when he crossed the Atlantic, he wouldn't have felt so gay at the prospect of a week on salt water.

They set out joyously. Terry's cousin and host, Peter Ward, was just such another genial, whole-souled chap as McGrady himself, and January liked him at sight. When the little catboat, *Wave*, left South Boston on her way up the coast, that bright Monday morning, one couldn't have found in all New England a happier lad than the fat boy.

He was still cheerful when they were abreast of Spectacle Island, and off Lovell's he managed

to crack a joke. But when they rounded Deer Island and met the swell which indicated that they were fairly headed up Massachusetts Bay, he sobered somewhat, and when they were half-way to the East Point of Nahant he began to gulp once in awhile and look a little green.

"Homesick, January?" asked Terry.

"No, sir, thank ye, sir," the fat boy answered. "Hi was a-wondering, ye know, why Hi ate them bloomink 'erring for me breakfast."

"What you want for dinner is some salt pork and molasses," Ward suggested, with a wink at Terry. "Nothing better for a hearty meal at sea. You pour the molasses over the pork, you know."

January swallowed hard, and walked forward. About this time, he was thinking that he would never again want anything to eat, and wishing that he had never done so foolish a thing as to put food into his mouth.

Quite a stiff breeze had blown up, when they got out into the bay, and the catboat was pretty well heeled over and pitching considerable. January wasn't frightened — in fact, there were moments when he didn't care if she did upset — but before they rounded East Point he had to admit that he was sick.

Ward gave him a lemon to suck, and January clutched it eagerly and thought at first that it made him feel better. But all of a sudden he

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threw the lemon overboard and collapsed in an unhappy heap, clinging for dear life to the star-board rail.

There was pluck in the fat boy's makeup, and he didn't whine, although, if one had strength to do so, he would be justified in crying about seasickness, than which there are few afflictions more distressing. But when they were off Marblehead he was suffering so severely that the navigators decided to run in and anchor for the night in smooth water.

"Sure you'll be all right by bedtime, January, and to-morrow and afterwards you'll have the time of your life," said Terry, consolingly. "'Tis terrible while it lasts, is seasickness, but it doesn't last for ever, and it does a fellow good."

"Hi think Hi'd rather take me medicine some hother way, ye know," was the fat boy's feeble reply. But he soon began to feel better, now they were free of the motion that had set his stomach rolling, and an hour on dry land persuaded him that, as Terry said, he would be all right next day.

Next day, however, he was all wrong — if anything, worse.

There was a raw, cold wind and a following sea, and the catboat bored into the water as though she had a grudge against it. January had to give in, before they had left the anchorage three miles behind, and his groans were saddening to hear.

"Better stick it out on deck," Ward advised. "You'll be worse if you go into the cuddy."

"'Ow can Hi be worse, what?" moaned the fat boy. "Me 'eart and me lungs are all in a 'eap, blow me!"

"Guess it'll have to be Gloucester for us, to-night," said Ward to Terry. "Pretty hard on the boy, to keep him out longer." Terry nodded assent.

"Hi'm a-going 'ome to-morrow, if Hi 'ave to swim!" said January, with determination, when he was able to speak once more. "Hi'd rather try me luck in school, ye know, than fight the Hatlantic Hocean!"

"Nonsense, boy!" was Terry's rejoinder. "Sure you're liable to get over this at any minute, and then you'll have fun."

But January would not argue, and he stuck to his intention. Though Wednesday was a beautiful day, and there didn't seem to be a capful of wind, he insisted on going ashore and taking the train.

"Hi've thrown up the sponge — and hevery-think helse," he said with a mournful smile. "Hi can't stand seafaring, ye know. It's too 'ard on me nerves."

"Good way to train down," Terry suggested.

"Hi'd rather hask the schoolmaster to take me flesh hoff," January answered. Indeed he very nearly did it. So great was his relief at

reaching Millvale, the torments of the sea escaped, that he presented himself at the River Street grammar school that very afternoon, all ready to be assigned to a class.

He had passed an examination, the week before, and come through it well, — thanks to Lou Mains's coaching. The sixth grade was the one to which he proved to belong, and the principal took him into one of the class-rooms and handed him over to the teacher, Miss Trefethen.

Miss Trefethen was not a very sweet-tempered person at the best of times, but to-day, with much on her mind, she was unusually snappish. She drew her register toward her and asked the new boy's name.

"January Jones, hif you please, miss," was the reply.

"Ridiculous!" snarled the teacher. Of course she had no business to say that, since the boy was not responsible for his name, and January didn't like it a bit.

"Then it's January Jones hif you don't please, miss," he said, speaking as curtly as she.

"No impertinence, sir!" cried Miss Trefethen. "Where were you born, and how old are you?"

"London, and Hi'm heleven."

"Take that seat."

January walked over and sat down. Then he got up again. The teacher looked at him.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Hif you please, miss, this seat ain't 'olesome, ye know," said January, mildly.

"What in the world —"

"Me feet don't touch the floor, and it cramps me to reach hup to the desk part," the fat boy explained. "The seat was made for a tall boy, ye know, and it's not a good fit."

"Be seated, and hold your tongue!" the teacher ordered.

"Hif you please, miss, Hi'd rather not." The tone was gentle and respectful, but firm.

Miss Trefethen took another look at January. She had heard of the fat boy, she knew he had influential friends, she did not want to begin the term with a squabble, and she read in her new pupil's expression that, if he thought himself imposed upon, he was very likely to raise one. She realized, moreover, that, if there were desks which did "fit," she had no right to place a scholar where he would be uncomfortable; and, after the wise second thought, she walked forward.

"Sit down, and let me see," she said, more pleasantly. January seated himself.

"Hi'm a hathlete, ye know, and Hi can't go against me training, what?" he suggested.

The teacher smiled, in spite of herself. "Perhaps I was hasty," she admitted. "Take any unoccupied desk that does seem to fit."

"Thank you, miss," the fat boy answered.

With much deliberation he surveyed the room, tried several seats, and finally made his choice.

“Satisfied?” the teacher asked.

“Yes, miss, thank you, miss.”

January was the kind of boy who is bound to be “satisfied” — that is, to have all that by right belongs to him. It was a good thing for the teacher, perhaps, that she had found it out early.

CHAPTER XXVI

BAMBINO CALLS AT MILLVALE HIGH

To return to Captain's Jack's school, of course there were many pupils who having, like him, moved up a class, found the change altogether agreeable. For example, Tom Lorimer and Roger Ahearn, who were now middlers, seemed to have nothing to fret about and to be very proud of themselves. Perhaps it was by way of celebration that they stirred up things on the second day of school. And yet, to be fair to them, it mainly "happened so."

The happenings began while the boys were on the way to school. Carrying an old-fashioned hand-organ with a monkey perched atop, an Italian passed them. As Tom and Roger glanced at the monkey, the same idea seemed to strike each boy, and they burst into a roar of laughter.

"The living image of Swipes Duncan, our beloved classmate, ain't he?" Tom said. "I'd give a dollar if Swipes could see him!"

The Italian caught that mention of money, and came to a halt at once.

"You lika buy my monk'?" he asked eagerly.

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"He ver' good monk' and I sella him sheep — only t'ree dollar!"

Tom's eyes began to twinkle. "There ought to be some fun in that piece of livestock," he said. "Got any money? I'll put up two dollars, if you'll chip in one."

"How you going to get him anywhere, if you buy him?" Roger objected. "Buy the hand-organ, too, to carry him on?"

Before Tom could answer, the Italian produced a small canvas bag.

"You putta him in dis," he said. "Lika dis — see?"

He opened the mouth of the bag and made a sign. The monkey hopped off his shoulder and wriggled into the bag, and the Italian drew it together, not too tightly, and smiled triumphantly.

"Whatta more?" he asked. The boys understood that to mean that he wanted to know if they had any other objection to raise. They couldn't think of any, just then, and so they handed over the three dollars and the Italian stumped away. But by the time he turned the corner the boys had realized that it was very nearly 9 o'clock.

"What'll we do with him till 2 o'clock?" Roger grumbled.

"Oh, I'll put the bag in my desk," Tom answered, assuming more confidence than he

really felt. "With the mouth open as it is, and the desk-top up, he'll be all right.

"Say," he added, "we'll call him Bambino. That's Italian for baby, I believe. He isn't a very big one, anyway. Come on, old sport!" — and he slung the bag over his shoulder — "we'll put you to bed for a few hours."

But Bambino had been none too well fed by his former master, and though he made not even a chatter of protest when Tom, slipping into the class-room, deposited him gently in his desk, it was a little too much to expect that a hungry monkey would "stay put" for half a day.

He might have kept still, feeling that there was a master within arm's reach, if Tom had remained at his desk. Unfortunately, Tom and his roommates had to go to the chemical laboratory during the third period, and in the silence and solitude Bambino listened to the rumblings of his empty stomach and got restless.

Taking the drawing-string of the bag between his front paws, Bambino applied his sharp white teeth and soon bit it through. It was the work of a moment to free himself from the desk, spring to the window-sill and take stock of his surroundings.

Like all monkeys, Bambino was intensely curious. He very soon discovered that the room was empty; but as he glanced out of the window he saw that he was at one end of a great building —

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with many other open windows — and, leaping to the yard, he proceeded to explore.

Sniff, sniff, sniff!

A faint, complex, but appetizing odour assailed his nostrils. It came through the open window of the basement lunch-room, and Bambino climbed in.

There was much to choose from, had there been time to choose, for many pupils, who lived at a distance, brought their luncheons. But it was a strange combination the monkey found in the first two baskets he opened — a home-made charlotte russe and a monstrous blood-pudding brought by a little Polish girl who was stronger in Latin than she was in hygiene.

Bambino seized both. But before he had a chance to investigate, the woman in charge of the lunch-room bustled in. At sight of the monkey she let out an ear-splitting scream.

The monkey had had quite as severe a scare. Hugging his treasures to his breast, he sprang through the window, ran back across the yard, still keeping close to the building, and squatted down just under the open windows of a junior class-room where Mr. Eckstrom, the principal's first assistant, was holding forth on the mysteries of German grammar.

Chattering to himself, Bambino started on the pudding. It was large and soft and sticky, and, though quite unlike anything he had ever seen

before, to a hungry monkey it looked luscious. He was just about to sample it when Mr. Blaisdell's terrier sauntered in through the gate from the street.

With a joyous bark the terrier dashed across the yard. Dropping the charlotte russe, but clinging to his precious pudding, Bambino promptly took refuge on the window-sill. The dog leaped into the air, and his snapping teeth missed Bambino's tail by the merest fraction of an inch.

That was nearer than Bambino liked. With a terrified squeal he sprang through the window, still clutching his pudding, and alighted on Mr. Eckstrom's desk.

If a bombshell had exploded in the class-room, Mr. Eckstrom could hardly have been more startled. He jumped aside with an involuntary cry of alarm, while at the same instant the boys burst into a yell of uncontrollable laughter.

Frightened by the uproar, Bambino leaped from the desk to the top of a blackboard, and from there to one of the beams which supported the ceiling. Here he squatted, with the pudding between his paws, chattering defiance at the boys and master.

"Who is responsible for this outrage?" demanded Mr. Eckstrom, reddening with wrath. "Does any one know to whom this monkey belongs?"

Nobody knew.

"Shall we drive it away, sir?" Jeff Bussey asked.

Not waiting for consent, the boys sprang to their feet, waving their arms and yelling at the top of their voices.

"Silence! Silence!" cried the master. "Resume your places! I will deal with the intruder."

He strode forward, underneath Bambino, and gestured wildly. "Shoo! Come down, sir! Go away!" he shouted.

Bambino swore a little, monkey fashion, but did not move.

"Throw something at him, sir," Bussey suggested.

This seemed a good idea. Mr. Eckstrom had a book in his hand. He took careful aim and shied it at Bambino.

"Two can play at that game," was what the monkey's chatter said, had anybody understood it. But they only noticed that the book whizzed past Bambino's head and fell back at the master's feet.

Mr. Eckstrom picked up the book. But even as he raised his hand for a second attempt, Bambino dropped the pudding. With a dull, moist thud the sticky mass alighted on Mr. Eckstrom's face and buried his head to the shoulders.

Dancing with rage, the master wildly plucked at the mess that concealed his features. Bam-

bino ran to and fro along the beam and in an almost human way chattered his delight. The girls looked rather scared and shocked; but the boys, helpless with merriment, laid their heads on each other's shoulders and fairly shrieked.

Scared by the racket, as well she might have been, Miss Burbank rushed in from the next room.

"What in the world has happened?" she gasped, gazing at Mr. Eckstrom in stupefied bewilderment.

Before Mr. Eckstrom or any one else could reply, Bambino took a flying leap and alighted on Miss Burbank's shoulder. Perhaps it was Miss Burbank's spectacles which excited his curiosity. Perhaps it was her glossy, jet-black hair, which every girl in school believed to be a wig.

"Ouch! Oh, dear! Oh, my! Take it away — take it away!" screamed Miss Burbank in panic-stricken terror.

Convulsed with laughter, the boys scrambled forward to Miss Burbank's assistance. At the same instant Bambino twined his paws in Miss Burbank's hair, and gave a vigorous tug.

The girls had not been mistaken. It was a wig, and, in response to Bambino's tug, it came off. And even as the boys fell back, startled by the transformation its absence wrought, even as Miss Burbank uttered an inarticulate wail of dismay, Bambino sprang to the desk, still grasping

the wig, and vanished through the window — “out of the frying-pan into the fire.”

Though the monkey did not know it, Mr. Blaisdell's terrier was still dancing and barking outside. When Bambino leaped out, with Miss Burbank's wig, he dived head-foremost into the dog's jaws. Snap! The terrier's teeth met in something soft and hairy. But it was not Bambino's hide. It was Miss Burbank's wig.

Bambino, unharmed, bounded along the yard and disappeared through the main doorway. Firmly believing that he had caught a piece of the monkey, if not the whole of him, the terrier shook the wig savagely, then pinned it down with his fore paws and began to worry it, growling with savage delight.

A moment later, a row of grinning faces appeared at the class-room windows.

“The monkey's gone, sir, and the principal's dog has caught Miss Burbank's wig,” reported Bussey, grinning more broadly at the sight of the teacher, who was standing in the middle of the room trying, confusedly, to cover her naked skull with a handkerchief.

Nobody sympathized with Miss Burbank. She was the teacher who had pretty nearly provoked a strike, as told in “Captain Jack Lorimer,” by suspending Tom Lorimer and several other boys in punishment for a piece of mischief of which only one was guilty. It would be a long time

before her pettish injustice was forgotten; and now, though everybody liked Mr. Eckstrom, and laughed at him only because the incident was so ludicrous that they couldn't help it, they didn't care much what happened to Miss Burbank — or her wig.

"Shall I try and get the — er — Miss Burbank's property?" somebody asked.

"No, I will," said Jeff Bussey; and before Mr. Eckstrom could reply he vaulted through the open window.

"Toby! Good dog! Smart dog!" he murmured, advancing toward the terrier.

Toby eyed Jeff suspiciously for an instant. But when Jeff put out a hand and patted his head, Toby wagged his tail and felt very proud of himself. No doubt the boy was complimenting his bravery. It pleased Toby very much.

He did not feel so pleased when, a moment later, Jeff snatched the wig and climbed back through the window. That was treacherous, Toby thought, and he barked his disapproval. Then, sniffing the ground for a second or two, he trotted away on the trail of Bambino.

"Your wig, Miss Burbank," said Bussey, presenting it with a low bow. "I'm afraid it's — er — slightly damaged."

It seemed so, indeed. Half the hair had been torn out by the roots and there were two great rips in the canvas "scalp." When the teacher

clapped it on her head there was a wisp of hair on each side of her face and a long "rat's tail" hung down her back.

Amid shrieks of laughter from the boys and the contemptuous giggles of the girls, Miss Burbank bolted from the room; and just then Mr. Eckstrom got tired of clawing pudding out of his eyes and scraping it from his neck, and concluded the easiest way to get clean would be to take a bath.

"Class dismissed!" he said.

Meantime, as has been told, Bambino had gone into the main entrance. Up to the second floor he went, and stole along until he came to a door which was slightly ajar. There, hearing a murmur of voices, he stopped to investigate.

The door was that of Professor Blaisdell's office. The voices were those of the principal and Mr. Webb, a prominent lawyer and a member of the school committee — once an enemy of Lorimer's, because his son, Rel, was Jack's rival, but now as friendly as any one could wish.

It was a question of school policy that they were discussing. The principal had stated the case, and Mr. Webb had given his opinion at some length. But, before Mr. Blaisdell could reply, an excited bark sounded from the corridor, followed by a scream that was almost human in its terror.

The terrier had tracked Bambino. The next instant the door flew open. In dashed the monkey,

the dog at his heels; and then for a few seconds it was as if a tornado had broken loose in the room.

Bambino leaped on the principal's desk, and from it to the top of a bookcase. As he sprang from the desk his hind paws sent the ink-stand flying into Mr. Blaisdell's lap, and as he alighted on the top of the bookcase he knocked down a plaster bust of Shakespeare, which fell on Mr. Webb's head and smashed into a thousand pieces.

The lawyer howled and danced round the room, holding his head between his hands. Mr. Blaisdell sprang to his feet with an angry cry; but just there his own dog got mixed up with his legs, and the ruler of Millvale High sat down in the waste-basket with a crash that made the windows rattle.

Terrified by that, Bambino took a flying leap and landed on the top of the door. Thence he sprang down into the corridor, raced to the other end, found an open window, and in a moment was "shinning" a water-pipe up to the roof.

Here he believed he was safe from his pursuer, and he paused a moment to consider the situation. Presently an open skylight attracted his attention. He crawled to the edge and peered cautiously down.

The skylight was in the roof of a room used as a sort of headquarters by an old woman engaged

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by Mr. O'Brien to help with the cleaning. An apple and a banana stood in plain view on the top of a packing box.

Here was food such as the soul of Bambino craved. He dropped through the open skylight and made short work of the fruit. But it only whetted his appetite. He was bound to know if there was any more fruit in the neighbourhood.

The door was not fastened. He pulled it open and hopped out on a narrow landing. But there, face to face, he met the old woman herself.

It must be remembered that the monkey still wore the scarlet coat and cap with which the organ-grinder had fitted him, and the scrub-woman, meeting such a hairy apparition in such a place, straightway jumped to the conclusion that this was one of the imps of his satanic majesty. She screamed, dropped the pail of water she was carrying, and fell on her knees.

It was an innocent victim, Janitor O'Brien, who caught the contents of the water-pail. Down the well of the stairway it dropped, clear to the first floor. And as the soapy torrent landed on O'Brien's head, half choking and wholly blinding him, the monkey sprang down the stairs and out of the front door.

Eckstrom's pupils, dismissed for an hour because of the accident to the master, were amusing themselves in the yard. Jeff Bussey was the first to see Bambino as he sprinted down

the steps and toward the gate, but in the twinkling of an eye a dozen or fifteen other fellows were in hot pursuit.

The nimble-footed monkey reached the gate yards ahead of his pursuers, and took refuge in the branches of a tree on the opposite side of the road. While the boys were planning how to dislodge him, a cart rattled down the street containing two men — the driver and an olive-hued person whom Jeff recognized as an organ-grinder he had encountered on another street a day or two before.

Jeff, of course, was not aware that Tom and Roger had bought Bambino. In fact, nobody knew it but the two boys themselves — and they were not on the ground. So Jeff took it for granted that the monkey had escaped from its master, and, holding up his hand, he stopped the cart.

"Here he is, signor!" Jeff cried. "If you're offering any reward for his recapture, now's your time to fork it out. He's up that tree."

"Wotta you mean?" the Italian asked.

"Your monkey," said Jeff. "He's escaped, hasn't he? Well, there he is — in that tree."

The sharp-witted Italian took in the situation at a glance. These boys did not know that he had sold the monkey. Here was a chance to get his monkey back and keep the money too.

He sprang out of the cart, the driver of which

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had generously offered him a "lift," and ran to the foot of the tree. He called out something in Italian, and Bambino meekly dropped to the ground and allowed himself to be secured.

"I tank you verra mooch!" said the Italian, turning to Bussey and making him a sweeping bow. "You verra good honest boy!"

He climbed back into the cart, waved his hand most graciously, and, a moment later, he and the monkey were out of sight; and that was the last that was seen of Bambino at Millvale High.

CHAPTER XXVII

THREE TIMES ROUND CITY HALL SQUARE

BAMBINO had raised such a riot that Tom and Roger didn't feel a bit like advertising the loss of their property. The events in which the monkey had figured provided them with many quiet laughs; but it was not until weeks later, when the sufferers had calmed down, that the facts in the case became known.

Meanwhile they two were cherishing a grievance; and Captain Jack was the cause of it.

Rob Marr of Roxbridge had proposed a bicycle race between Roxbridge and Millvale, a race on a queer, original plan. He suggested that the cities be represented by teams of four men each; all eight to ride three times around City Hall Square, in Millvale; the last two on each side then to drop out; the first two to ride to Roxbridge and return to Millvale, "go-as-you-please."

Lorimer laughed when he heard of it. But, as he came to think it over, he realized that Marr's plan provided tests of speed, endurance, road-finding ability, and the pluck to keep on in the face of unforeseen obstacles; and such a race puts "stuff" into a man as well as takes it out.

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It would be fine advertising for the Millvale Athletic Club and the High School Athletic Association, moreover, calling attention to both and bidding for a continuance of the generous support that their friends had given. Indeed, the minute the scheme was publicly mentioned, people grew wildly excited. Those of a certain type began to make bets; others deluged the local papers with suggestions of short routes between the cities, and still others planned the make-up of the Millvale team as confidently as if they knew all about every boy who ever bestrode a bike.

For Jack Lorimer, who had the team to choose, it was no such simple matter.

He knew whom Roxbridge would put forward. They were Marr, Wales, Kerrison, and a new fellow who seemed to be coming forward to take the leadership which Marr would soon have to vacate, one George Blake.

But as for Millvale, though Jack knew that Ned Harriott was the star wheelman and Jim Elverton a close second, he was much in doubt about the other riders. He questioned whether he himself ought to ride, and, if he did, he did not know whom to name for fourth man. Then Tom Lorimer spoke.

"Why can't you give us younger fellows a chance?" he said. "Roger and I are pretty good on a wheel. Take him!"

"No, take Tom!" Roger said, quickly.

"I'd like to let you into this, boys," was Captain Jack's reply. "I doubt, though, if you have the staying power or the self-command. I mean by that that you may be hampered in all kinds of unlooked-for ways, and whether you could hold your grip and keep going —"

"Well, try us!" Tom cried.

"If I bar myself, as I feel like doing, on the ground that I haven't the speed, the rest of you ought to be willing to stay outside with me," was Lorimer's smiling rejoinder.

"Oh, shucks! You know the crowd won't let you bar yourself!" Roger rejoined, impatiently.

He proved a true prophet. Captain Jack's suggestion was met with a roar of protest, and no voices were louder than those of Harriott and Elverton, his two "sure" men.

"If you don't ride, Jack, I don't!" said Ned. Jim put it quite as forcibly.

"I wouldn't have believed it of you, Jack, — talking of throwing down your own side!" he growled.

"But I haven't the pace!" Lorimer argued.

"You talk as though Jim and I were a pair of chumps. Haven't we seen you ride?" Ned Harriott retorted.

Finally Jack put it to Tom Bell, who he knew would tell him the truth, whether it was flattering or not. Tom did not answer in haste. In fact, he

walked up and down the diamond, thoughtfully, for several minutes, before he stopped in front of Lorimer and nodded an affirmative.

"Make the run, Jack," he said. "I can't see a better man. It isn't speed that wins a race like that, so much as it is bottom and resourcefulness and knowledge of the country you're traversing. You're not exactly slow, either," he added, smilingly.

"Well, then, if you're bound to drag me into it, tell me the fourth man."

"Paul Davis," Bell answered. "Will Amos for a second choice—but Paul Davis by preference."

That was about the way Lorimer's judgment had pointed; and on Saturday morning, when all the riders assembled in City Hall Square, he felt pretty sure that this was a wise choice. Certainly Davis had a nice style, sat his machine well, and showed an ankle action suggestive of great power.

But nothing about him or the other wheelmen was so worthy of notice as was the square itself. The city fathers had recognized the race by roping off a course for the riders and providing officers to patrol it; and all around the course, and in almost every window of the shops and office buildings that faced it, spectators massed in solid array, determined, many of them, to wait and cheer the winner, he who first got back from Roxbridge.

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The riders drew for position. Kerrison got the pole, and then, lined up in order, came Blake, Davis, Marr, Wales, Lorimer and Harriott, with Elverton on the outside.

A moment later, the crack of the starter's pistol echoed over the square, and the eight riders stooped and strained in their saddles, moving at first slowly, then faster and faster. The first lap was quickly reeled off, and as yet the wheelmen were pretty well bunched.

As the second lap was half completed, Blake and Elverton took the lead. A change had come over the riders. Their heads were well over the handles, now, their lips grimly set, their expressions contorted into one almost of agony, and with ankles absolutely clawing the pedals round, and with thighs, knees and bodies working in perfect unison, they hit up a sprint.

There was no loafing in this race, no attempt at loafing, and the delighted crowd yelled its approval. Faster and faster grew the pace, and steadily the better men drew away from three or four who seemed to be already pumped out.

Blake had opened up a gap, but, a bare length away, rode Lorimer, Harriott and Kerrison. Suddenly Harriott put in a lightning sprint and dispossessed Blake and Elverton of the lead. But Blake would not be shaken off, and as Kerrison and Lorimer inched up to the Millvale cyclist, the Roxbridge boy got in line with them.

With the third lap half run, Harriott still led and had not turned a hair. Almost even with him rode Kerrison, Blake and Lorimer.

Ten yards back came Elverton, the nearest man of the beaten quartet, and stringing along behind him were Davis, Marr and Wales. The spectators had already "picked the winners," and secure in their own leadership, the winners were taking it a little more easily than in that heart-breaking second round.

But Paul Davis, the youngest and lightest of the Millvale four, was bound to make a better showing. He knew the Millvale two — the right two — were at the front and would remain there — but not for him that position he now held, with the last of the tail-enders!

Amid a roar of delight from the crowd, he suddenly forced his machine ahead. Out of his place in the final trio, up toward Elverton, he dashed, and then, taking Jim's measure, first lapped and then passed him with an amazing burst of speed, just as the four winners eased off at the tape.

Elverton frankly held out his hand.

"Good enough, young one!" he said. "You caught me when I wasn't looking — but it was my business to be looking, and I don't say you couldn't have done it, just the same, if I had been."

"Thank you, Jim," was Davis's grateful

rejoinder. "You've been in athletics so long that I knew you could afford to spare a little glory, and since this is about the first time I've had a real chance to prove myself, I was bound to do all there was in me."

Meanwhile the winners were taking the fifteen minutes' rest to which the rules of the contest entitled them. But the spectators were busy enough to make up — busy applauding their favourites.

"We'll be watching for you, Captain Jack!" "Be the first home, Blake!" "More power to you, Kerrison!" "Harriott's as good as won!" "Three cheers for Millvale High!" "Come quick, Lorimer!" "Blake's the man for my money!" And punctuating such cries and comments arose the school cheers, rattling volley-like, while the girl friends of the schools waved their colours, and a band that nobody listened to, or could hear, played a rousing march.

The intermission was almost over when Will Chapin quietly rode into the group of cyclists, dismounted, handed the wheel to Ned Harriott, and, mounting the wheel with which Ned had won the race around the square, rode as quietly away. Harriott and Lorimer exchanged significant glances.

"Sure you can depend on it, Ned?" asked Lorimer.

"Certain sure, Jack," Harriott answered.

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“ Good luck to you, then, old boy! ”

“ In line! ” the starter cried.

And Harriott and Lorimer for Millvale, and Kerrison and Blake for Roxbridge, lined up a moment, and then, at the sound of the shot, pedalled swiftly away — every man a different road, it seemed — en route for Roxbridge, “ go-as-you-please! ”

CHAPTER XXVIII

NED AND HIS WHEEL IN BATTLE

THE road Ned Harriott pleased to take was — over the railroad track!

It sounds like a crazy enterprise, but it was far from being such. Between Millvale and Roxbridge the track was just about “as the crow flies.” It was almost exactly fifteen miles from one depot to the other, and, after much study of road maps and many explorations of short cuts, the boys could not plan any route that did not exceed that distance by more than two miles.

Of course there was risk to the wheel, which probably stood more chance of a puncture than on the level highway. An outsider might have predicted serious danger to Ned, for he had to cross a long trestle and go through a tunnel; and at the sight of the bridge, to say nothing of the tunnel, the average rider would have gasped and turned backward. But Ned was not an average rider.

He could have come pretty near to qualifying as an expert, and he could do things with his wheel that many a professional never dreams of

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attempting. It was not an ordinary wheel, either, but a built-to-order machine, heavier than the average cycle, since it was reinforced at every point where there seemed to be the slightest chance of a breakdown. It was this wheel that Will Chapin had brought, taking away the light roadster Ned had ridden around the square; and, as he felt the stanch frame beneath him, Harriott smiled and patted the handle-bars in a way that was full of meaning.

He durst not strike the railroad by the very shortest route, for Kerrison of Roxbridge had the nerve to follow that same course, if he was reminded of it, and some little accident might cripple one rider and leave the other free to go forward. But, cutting down Albany Street at a pace to throw off inquisitive pursuers, he took in a little stretch of Bank Street, and then, with one glance around, boldly switched his machine up on to the ties.

It was hard wheeling, but he had expected that. The only way to make it anything less than intolerable was to keep up his best speed, take the ties in a continuous string, so to speak, and thus save some of the bounce and jar that would soon have unseated a slow rider. Yet he couldn't stop to think of discomfort. He had to keep his eyes and his mind on his work. For there were a dozen places in the first five or six miles where the roadbed ran along a high embankment, and

where, if his wheel had swerved a little, he would have pitched to the bottom of the cut.

At the stations he sprinted. There were loafers hanging around who would want to know all about it, and he stooped low and put all his force into the pedals. The little he gained thus he probably lost when trains came along and he had to lift his wheel from the track; but the momentary rest refreshed him, and he did not regret it.

He took the trestle at a frantic rate, — it was the only way to cross those sleepers that seemed so woefully far apart, — but it neither scared him nor unseated him. The tunnel was a thing he dreaded worse. But he had mapped the course of it pretty carefully, and now he turned on a pocket search-light, which gave him much of the road ahead, and he came through to daylight without mishap.

In a flash of thought he wondered, once in awhile, where Jack and the other fellows were. But he hadn't much time to wonder. He just sprinted along, not even pausing to wipe the perspiration from his face. And, almost before he realized it, Roxbridge sights were in his eyes and ears, and it was time to leave the track again and take to the streets.

After that wild ride a cobblestone pavement was a treat, and a bit of asphalt represented bliss. He got a good stretch of easy going toward the

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end, and came into Lincoln Square at a lively clip, feeling alert and ready for business.

There was a crowd waiting. They cheered him heartily, though few of them knew who he was, and the judge and timekeeper smiled in a friendly way as they indorsed his identification check.

"First man in," the judge said. "And a Millvale man, eh? Oh, well, some of our fellows will catch you up on the way back. Which route did you take?"

"That's telling," Harriott answered. "Tell you to-morrow!" And he was off again.

It braced him amazingly to know that he was in the lead so far, and he did no "soldiering" over the soft places, but fairly ate up the mile he thought he ought to cover before taking to the track again. Nor did he loiter when the hard riding came, the procession of sleepers, but bumped along as perseveringly as if on level ground.

The tunnel was in sight for the second time, when suddenly his eye, happening to glance aside, was caught by the rails. He checked himself and looked again. Yes, it was as that first casual glance had notified him. At the edge of a steep embankment, one rail had been lifted bodily!

That meant accident — or rather, murder! The first train that passed that way would be thrown down the embankment!

And where was the nearest station? Yes, he

remembered now, it was on the other side of the tunnel, more than a mile away. He tore through the tunnel as if fiends were after him, not even stopping to switch on his search-light.

But, once through, he broke his pace as abruptly as he had done before. There were four men on the track just ahead of him. It almost seemed as if they must have come through the tunnel.

"Go back through the tunnel to the next station on the Roxbridge side!" he shouted. "The track's torn up, back there, and there'll be a wreck!"

The effect of his words was electrical. With a swift exchange of glances, the men ranged themselves across the track at a distance of about ten yards. Harriott was forced to stop and dismount. Threatening looks on the faces of the strangers made him suspicious.

"Out of my way!" he cried. "I haven't a second to lose, I tell you! The track's been torn up. A train may come along at any minute. If it does it will be wrecked and people will be killed. Let me pass!"

There was another swift exchange of glances, and some low mumbling.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Ned, preparing to go on.

"You don't get past us, young feller," said one of the men, taking a threatening grip of his club.

"What do you mean? I tell you it's a matter of life or death!"

"'Tain't no concern of yours."

Harriott took a look at the hangdog quartet, and his first dim suspicion deepened into something like certainty. These rascals were up to deadly mischief, and they would stick at nothing to prevent his riding on to give the alarm. But his mind was made up. He would pass them at all hazards.

"Out of the way!" he shouted, leaping into the saddle. He got on speed at once. Instinctively the men, in their surprise, obeyed his order, ranging themselves at the side of the track. But in the next instant they came to themselves and moved together as if to hem him in.

Quicker than it takes to tell it, Ned was abreast of the strangers. Then something happened.

Abruptly the cyclist checked his progress and gave a wrench at the handle-bars of his machine. Up flew the heavy front wheel with Harriott balancing himself adroitly on the back one. Then, with a sudden jerk, he whirled the machine around. The front wheel caught one of the men on the thigh, sending him sprawling down the embankment.

Round and round spun the bicycle like a top, with the back tire for peg. Down went another man. Then, throwing his weight forward, Harriott righted the wheel in an instant, and before the

other two ruffians could put out a hand to stop him, he was off along the track.

Riding his hardest to make up for lost time, a sudden sound filled him with dread alarm. Borne on the breeze from far, far away, he heard the whistle of an engine. Harriott set his teeth and pedalled for very life.

A gasp of relief escaped him as, looking up, he sighted a little station. The station-master was there too, conspicuous in his uniform coat and cap. With a final burst of speed Ned dashed up to the platform and, letting his wheel roll where it would, made a flying leap toward the man.

"Stop the train!" he gasped. "Stop the train!"

Open-mouthed the station-master stared at the lad who had dropped on him so unexpectedly, and with such a message.

"Stop the train, man! Stop the train, or it will be wrecked! The rails have been torn up!"

At last! At last the station-master understood. He rushed for his red flag and waved it desperately, frantically.

It was almost too late. As the locomotive dashed by, Ned could see the engineer craning his neck around for another look, as if unable to realize that his express had been delayed at such a mean little station. Surprise and anger were clearly expressed in his face.

But, since it was so, there must be some reason

for it, and he durst not disobey the signal. The air-brakes were applied. Slowly the speed slackened, and at last the flyer came to a stop at the very mouth of the tunnel, just short of the spot where danger waited.

CHAPTER XXIX

THERE AND BACK WITH THE OTHERS

THE experiences of Kerrison and Blake, the Roxbridge riders, have not much part in this story. In fact Blake's experience practically ended at Roxbridge, since, before he had fairly started on his return to Millvale, he took a header on a wet asphalt pavement, and threw out his shoulder. And Kerry, who had the happy-go-lucky temperament strongly developed, tried a short cut on the return journey, and got hopelessly lost within four miles of his goal.

But, as has been seen, Ned Harriott had an adventure large enough for the whole bunch. And Captain Jack, perhaps because he was engaged in a go-as-you-please, seemed to be called on by everybody to do some pleasing.

Lorimer's route, planned after a good many consultations, was largely composed of such short cuts as brought Kerrison to grief. For a mile or so out of the fifteen, he could follow roads that paralleled the railroad track; but most of his journey led him from the highway, through lanes, across fields, and, in one instance, through

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a strip of woods where there was not so much as a footpath.

It was not so very long after he left City Hall Square, that he had his first chance to do a good turn. He didn't hunt for it, but it rose up and smacked him, so to speak, and nearly broke his neck; for, as he turned a corner sharply into an alley, he came upon an overturned farm wagon that, with the prostrate horse, completely blocked the thoroughfare.

As he pulled up, just in time to avoid a spill, a grizzled old farmer, at work at the tangled harness, looked up pitifully.

"Say, neighbour, help me get this hoss up, will ye?" he asked.

"But I'm racing!" Lorimer objected.

"Be ye? So was this hoss." And Captain Jack laughed and spent five precious minutes in helping the old man to get the horse on his feet and right the cart.

Half-way to Roxbridge, Lorimer met another delay, though that was only for a minute, when he came upon a big boy beating a small one, and stopped long enough to give the bully an emphatic warning and make sure the little fellow had a chance to escape.

Not much farther on, he knocked down a small girl who, when she saw him coming, first decided to stay on one side of the street, then concluded to go to the other, and ended by running under



“ A WILD - LOOKING STRANGER STEPPED SUDDENLY OUT
BEFORE HIM.”

the wheel. Every cyclist meets that kind, but not every cyclist has the patience to stop and comfort the hen-minded sufferer, as Captain Jack did.

But all these things took time. When he got to Lincoln Square, he found that Harriott, Kerri-son and Blake were all ahead of him. It looked as though he was tagged for "It."

Well, it was a relief, anyway, to know that Ned's perilous experiment at the railroad track was going all right so far; and the Roxbridge fellows were good fellows and friends, and, if they won, there would be no occasion to tear his hair. But, since Harriott was taking more risk than anybody else in the race, it did really seem that he ought to have better backing, and on the homeward journey, Lorimer decided, it would be something really serious that delayed him.

Fate was kind, at first. He made up a lot of time, and had come to that patch of woods, only six miles from the starting and stopping place, when the delay arrived.

In the deepest of the wood, where the shadows lay thickly, and he had to slow up and pick his way, a wild-looking stranger stepped suddenly out before him with a grotesque flourish of welcome.

The stranger was ragged, but the rags had been expensive garments, once; and though his talk and actions were queer, to say the least, he had

the accent and manner of a gentleman. He came close to Lorimer and made another bow.

"After many days!" he said. "I rejoice to perceive that the king of this country has at last sent an intelligent youth to assist my experiments in gravitation."

"Yes?" Jack answered. "May I ask, sir, what particular experiment you have in mind at present?"

The ragged stranger came close and hissed the answer in Lorimer's ear.

"It has to do with the alternate play of the principles of attraction and repulsion between animal and vegetable substances," he said. "In brief, my theory is that, if I attach myself to the very top of the tallest tree — I have selected the tree — that tree will bend and ultimately fall. I can not perform this experiment unaided, it being beyond my skill to sustain myself while securing myself. But I perceive that you have a leather belt, and by that token I know that you were sent to aid me. Shall we begin?"

It was a puzzling situation. The man was evidently insane. But how to humour him to a point where he could be taken care of, was a question that might have perplexed a wiser mind. It would not do to fight with him, or to frighten him into disappearing, and Jack was at a loss what to say, until there popped into his head the thought of a certain sub-police station, at the

edge of Millvale and a mile or two outside his route, where the sergeant in charge was a genial and tactful man.

"It is true, sir," he said, "that the king of this country heartily approves your experiments, but he desires to suggest that they take a somewhat different course. The play of attraction and repulsion between animal and mineral substances seems to him the more important principle to be determined at present, and he has commanded me to lend my aid to attach you to the weather-vane of the tallest church steeple in this part of his dominions."

"Ha! Hum!" the lunatic muttered. Jack watched him anxiously. But suddenly the other's face brightened, as he came to a conclusion.

"It is for his Majesty to command, and for a humble student to obey," he said. "Lead me to the scene of the experiment, and I shall reward you liberally!"

Then followed for Lorimer a half-hour of heart-breaking strain and anxiety as, watching the madman's every mood and agreeing with his craziest conclusions, he led him toward the place where that fine old sergeant would be found.

Happily they met the officer on the road, and Captain Jack, with all due gravity, described the stranger's purpose. The sergeant approved, of course, but invited the lunatic to eat and sleep before he carried it out. Promising to return

and lead the man to "the scene of the experiment," Lorimer pedalled away.

It was probably not worth while, now, to try to make up time, but he did his best, and his best was very good indeed. Almost before he knew it, he struck into that mile which paralleled the railroad; and, as he happened to glance toward the track, his gaze fell on Ned Harriott, who was just trundling his wheel down the embankment to the road.

"Tire?" Jack called. Harriott nodded.

"Busted — blew right up, just now," he said. Then in the briefest terms he described the happenings back at the tunnel.

"But you want to be getting along," he said. "If I'm out of it, no reason why I should delay you."

"I'm already delayed, bless you," Lorimer responded. "Of course those other fellows were home long ago."

"Never can tell," Ned argued. "Get a move on! Tell mother and sister I'm coming!" he added with a melancholy grin.

Mainly because it was his principle never to give up until he knew the game was over, Lorimer "hit her up." To his intense astonishment he found he had brought in Millvale winner.

Nobody knew where Kerrison was. As a matter of fact, Kerry was over in "Slabtown," so called, wandering around in back alleys and being grossly

misdirected by mischievous little boys. But Blake's accident had been reported, and Captain Jack was able to tell of the events in which Harriott had borne so large a part.

It was due to the fellows that these things should be made known to their friends, many of whom had been waiting impatiently for nearly three hours; and, following the official announcement of results, and the applause, the judge raised his hand for silence.

"I regret to say that Mr. George Blake of Roxbridge threw out his shoulder by a fall, early in the return journey, and was compelled to retire," he said. "Mr. Blake rode a game race, up to that moment, and his friends might reasonably have expected to see him land a winner.

"In justice to Mr. Edward Harriott of Millvale," the judge went on, "who took the difficult and dangerous route down the railroad track, and was the first rider to reach Roxbridge, I should say that, near the tunnel near Roxbridge, he discovered the work of train-wreckers, four miscreants who had a grievance against the railroad.

"He escaped from the wreckers, gave warning just in time to save a heavily loaded train, and afterward assisted in capturing the villains. Mr. Lorimer generously adds that, even with the handicap of so much time lost, Mr. Harriott would have been here ahead of him, but for a

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punctured tire. I propose three cheers for Mr. Harriott and Mr. Blake."

Of course Captain Jack did his share of the cheering. But when it was all over, he turned to Tom Bell.

"They ought to leave out the cheers for the rest of us and give them all to Ned," he said.

"He was the only man in that race!"

Perhaps Lorimer was more modest than he needed to be. At any rate, though he did not now suspect it, he was destined soon to figure in another kind of race, in which he himself would be "the only man."

CHAPTER XXX

SOMEBODY ELSE TO RIDE THE ROGUE

"Music! Don't talk about anything so tame!" said May Roxton. She pretended to be vexed, and very much in earnest, but there was a twinkle in her eye which Jack Lorimer did not overlook. "I don't care anything about music!" she went on. "I'm interested in nothing but horses and racing!"

"Going to ride King Tom, are you?" Captain Jack asked, slyly; and then May became really serious, and answered with a vigour that left him in no doubt as to how she felt.

"I wish to goodness I could!" she said.

It was Monday afternoon, and they were strolling slowly home from the depot. The train by which May returned from her music lesson in Boston reached Millvale half an hour after school closed, and somehow it seemed to happen that on those three days of the week Captain Jack had business in that vicinity about that time. Generally the walk to the Roxton place was all a pleasure. But to-day May had seemed worried and upset from the first, and now she acted as

if she wanted to confide her troubles — which were not her own, after all.

“ I met Uncle George Burtis in Boston,” she said. “ He was just savage. I didn’t think he could be so cross. It’s all about King Tom. It appears by what the trainer tells him that the horse is turning into a regular demon. There’s only one jockey dares to mount him. And that fellow, Benbar — ”

“ Yes? ” Lorimer suggested, as she paused a moment.

“ Well, Benbar’s trying to take advantage, Uncle George thinks. You know Uncle George, so you can understand how anything like that would enrage him. Probably if it was left entirely to his generosity he’d give the jockey twice his fee, but to be held up, as he calls it, made to pay more than the rider gets from other people — Oh, the language he used about it is perfectly shocking! And yet,” May added, with a roguish smile, “ I think if I was a man in his place I’d talk just as he does! ”

“ Queer about King Tom, though,” Lorimer said, thoughtfully. “ He’s a spirited horse, one that doesn’t want to be fooled with, but I can’t imagine him as really evil-tempered.”

“ Nor I,” May agreed, and she was almost in tears about it. “ Great, splendid fellow, I believe he’s being slandered. I’m going out to the park, to-morrow morning, to see him.”

"To the park?"

"Yes; the horse has been at Ely's place, near there, for several days. To-morrow morning they're planning to give him a trial."

"Why don't you invite me to come with you?" Jack asked.

"I will. I do. Uncle George won't mind, I'm sure. Probably it'll be a relief to him to have one more to listen to his — his language!"

Lorimer could easily understand why Mr. Burtis would use "language." If matters stood as May had reported, his pride was being wounded in more ways than one.

Five years before, a syndicate that expected great results from the investment had laid out a half-mile track on the outskirts of Millvale. A three days' meeting had been planned, with bookmakers and all the metropolitan "fixings." But the authorities, local and State, promptly got after the gamblers, and the meeting involved the promoters in serious loss.

The year following, the track went unused. But, the year after that, a number of Millvale men and men with Millvale connections — of whom Mr. Burtis was one — bought the place for a song, and gratified pure love of sport by racing their own horses, not caring much whether there were any spectators or not. They had a good deal of pleasure, which they were willing to pay for and anxious to enjoy again.

But of course in any such association there are men who dislike each other, and Mr. Burtis was at swords' points with Col. Mills, another member. Their horses had met twice as competitors, and twice Col. Mills's stable had won. This year Mr. Burtis had exulted in the prospect of King Tom distancing anything his rival could bring forward. The Burtis horse's victory had for months been conceded. And now, if King Tom had gone wrong — !

To make matters worse, it had lately been reported to Mr. Burtis that Col. Mills had bought a horse, Tyrant, which at least would give his own entry a hard run; and the prospect of being defeated a third time by his enemy was almost more than May's uncle could bear.

Yet, if there was only one jockey who could ride King Tom, Mr. Burtis must either submit to be put under his thumb, or else give up the idea of winning. May's uncle was an independent sort of citizen, who had started his fortune in a mining camp and learned there to maintain his rights, and to keep his hands off the jockey who meant to blackmail him was a pretty severe strain.

Jack wondered how he stood it. Wonderment deepened momentarily from the instant he entered the park on the following morning. And yet he was behindhand in arriving, and didn't see and hear all that happened to irritate the owner of the horse.

Mr. Burtis and May were early at the trainer's stable, but, early as it was, half the string of thoroughbreds of which Trainer Ely had charge had already left the yard.

"Mr. Ely's taken out King and three good ones, with four of our best boys up," said Donnell, the trainer's foreman. "Yes, sir, of course he'll wait for you before he pulls off the trial."

"How is the horse?" asked Mr. Burtis, anxiously.

"Sound as anything, sir, and feeding well; but Mr. Ely's fair puzzled. Says he's either an uncommon good one or a thorough rogue. We can't seem to do much with him here in the stables, and that's the truth!"

"How's that?"

"Shows fight if you even so much as go to turn over his straw," the foreman answered. "Nearly brained the boy that saddled him, this morning. And when we take him out — well, he runs like a champion for three or four furlongs and then gives it up and sulks. The Mystery, I call him!"

Mr. Burtis changed the subject abruptly.

"Benbar here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, he's gone over to the park. We didn't much expect him this morning — him and Mr. Ely had words last night, and Benbar swore he wouldn't come near the trial — but he came, after Mr. Ely and the others had started,

so I suppose you can have him up in place of our boy."

Mr. Burtis turned away. Then he came back a step.

"Er — what do you hear of Col. Mills's Tyrant, Donnell?" he asked, in a rather shamefaced tone.

"Well, sir, they do say he's shaping up fine," was the foreman's unwilling but honest reply.

Mr. Burtis switched at a mullein stalk viciously.

"Oh, well, there's many a slip," he quoted. "King Tom may beat him, yet!"

"Hope so, sir — and I'd wish it harder if it was anybody but Benbar riding him. That's a vicious animal himself, you know!"

Indeed, the jockey looked it, as he came forward to touch his cap — and incidentally to ask for an advance of fifty dollars. He was a wizened runt of a man, bow-legged, with long, ape-like arms and something of the expression of a gorilla, and he talked with a surly croak that set May's teeth on edge.

"This Ely gang don't know how to run a stable," he said, with a hostile glance toward the trainer, who was busy with the bunch of horses, a few yards away. "It was a chump trick, handin' the King over to 'em. I was mighty nigh not comin' down here, this mornin', bet your life!"

The owner gnawed his lip, but tried to speak pleasantly.

"Oh, well, Benbar, of course it's your place to be in the saddle for the trial," he said. "I'm counting on you to show us the horse at his best."

The jockey chuckled in his mean and sneering way.

"If I wasn't in the saddle you wouldn't see anybody else there — not past the quarter-mile post," he answered. "There's nobody else can stay on the hoss!"

Touching his cap indifferently, he walked over to where the horses waited. His face purple with suppressed rage, Mr. Burtis glared after him.

"By Jove, I wish I could find somebody else to ride King Tom!" he muttered.

May squeezed his arm and nodded at Captain Jack, who had just entered the enclosure. But not yet did Mr. Burtis understand all she meant.

"Ah, yes, Lorimer," he said. That his niece put forward Captain Jack as a jockey was the last thought that would have entered his head.

CHAPTER XXXI

THAT TRIAL RUN WITH MIDNIGHT

EVEN as Captain Jack approached his friends, the four horses got away, and it seemed but a moment later when they were rounding the turn and approaching the finish.

Two chestnuts, a bay and a black made up the quartet. The black had the advantage. Of the two chestnuts, one was tailed off ten lengths or more, and the other was fourth. There was no mistaking the horse that was last. It was King Tom!

At that result Mr. Burtis's irritation, so long repressed, had to break out. He motioned Benbar forward.

"I thought you said you could ride King Tom, and you were the only one," he cried, angrily. "Well, if you can ride him, why don't you?"

"I ain't promisin' anybody can ride him to win!" was the jockey's sullen reply.

As if to emphasize the criticisms that had been passed upon the horse, King Tom at that moment gave a lurch that nearly unshipped his rider. Benbar's retort was to hit him between the ears

with the butt-end of his riding-whip. Involuntarily Jack Lorimer sprang forward.

"Hold up, you brute!" he cried. "That's not the way to treat King Tom!"

The jockey stared and sneered; but it was the horse of which Captain Jack was thinking.

"If he's savage, he's become so very quickly," he said, turning toward May and Burtis in an explanatory way. "I don't believe it!"

"King, here, King, don't you know me?" he called. "King, lad! Hi, hi!"

The racer pricked up his ears, turned round, stretched his beautiful neck toward Jack Lorimer, sniffed the air as if to get scent of him, and then gave a whinny of delight. In another moment Jack had him by the bridle and was stroking his ears. And then Lorimer decided on a bold move. "Get out of the saddle!" he said.

Benbar's mouth opened, and he gaped in sheer bewilderment.

"Get out of the saddle, I say!" Jack repeated. And then the jockey found his tongue.

"You hear this cub?" he snarled. "Mind you, boss, if I gets out I stays out!"

"Well, get out!" roared Mr. Burtis. "To be tied to an ape like you involves more degradation than victory is worth!"

Sullenly, with a vicious glance at Lorimer, the jockey dropped down. In an instant Jack was in the seat, his hand on the reins.

For a moment he sat there, patting and petting the beautiful beast, instilling confidence, winning King Tom by kindness. Then he was off "like a streak of greased lightning." Trainer Ely, who was well mounted, galloped after, but he was dropped hopelessly within fifty yards, and away went the pair like the wind, the chestnut showing such unusual form and willingness that the trainer stared aghast.

"Pat," he cried to one of his stable boys, "go back and ask Donnell to put on his colors and ride up here on Midnight. Tell him I want him as soon as he can come."

"What do you intend to do?" asked Mr. Burtis.

"Try King Tom, with that lad up, against Midnight, the best animal in the stable, a winner, and in fine racing fettle. If the chestnut can hold him any part of the mile, it'll be good enough for me.

"I believe there's something in the horse, after all, sir, and it's taken that boy to bring it out. The beast wants humouring, that's all — though I don't think there's a lad in my stable or a jockey on the turf could coax the brute like that!"

"Think you've struck a little wonder, don't yer?" sneered Benbar, the jockey. He had watched Lorimer's performance with as much amazement as the others, and with envy and anger also. But in spite of the threat with which

he had dismounted, he was not yet ready to give up his profitable engagement.

"It's one thing to jolly a hoss into a little run, and another thing to take him around a track through half a dozen more!" he added, significantly.

"Very true, Benbar, very true," Mr. Burtis responded. He was slowly working back to his previous idea that Benbar must ride the race — that there was no one but Benbar — and so he tried to be civil to the man. And just as he retreated to his old position of dependence, so the jockey advanced, determined while he was about it to establish a hold that there could be no shaking off.

"Jockeys with a reputation don't have to worry about mounts," he said, with an unpleasant laugh. "Ain't none too many of us footloose — round here, anyways. Col. Mills sent for me yesterday and asked me if I'd ride his Tyrant."

"And what did you tell him?" Mr. Burtis demanded sharply.

"Told him to leave it open a day or two," the jockey answered, with an evil grin.

"What! You —" But May laid her hand on her uncle's arm.

"Don't argue with the rascal," she whispered. "Let him go! Jack will ride King Tom!"

"Jack?" Mr. Burtis hadn't thought of that. He rubbed his forehead, as if to stir up his brain,

and stared from his niece to the handsome lad who so gracefully bestrode the big horse.

"I mean it!" May murmured.

"Well! Well!" Mr. Burtis answered, helplessly. "We'll wait and see the result of this trial."

Benbar, the jockey, had moved aside, as if to show that he was independent and indifferent. But he watched every movement of the horse and rider, and his face told the jealous pangs with which he saw every evidence of King Tom's docility.

"Ah! here's Donnell!" Trainer Ely cried, excitedly, as his foreman rode up on a splendid black.

"Donnell," he went on, "King Tom seems to be showing form all at once — thanks to this young man. Mr. Lorimer, is it? Yes, Mr. Lorimer. Well, Donnell, I want you to go over the course with him. Don't favour him any, you understand. Let your horse out. Either I'm crazy now, or I have been up to this time, and I want to find out which it is!

"All ready?" he added, as he swung his field-glasses around from his shoulder. "Go!"

Less than two minutes later the trial had been run — and King Tom had won in a canter by five lengths, and come home on the bit. The chestnut with his amateur jockey had beaten the winner of many a purse, ridden by one of the craftiest whips in the country.

"Well, Donnell," said the master of the training stables, "what do you think of it, now?"

"Think of it!" answered the foreman, with a wide, delighted grin. "Why, that we've all been fooled! You've got the winner there, sir, to a certainty!"

"Yes," said the trainer, "provided Mr. Lorimer would ride!"

"What's to prevent him?" May broke in.

It was not so much that she answered the trainer. She spoke to Jack and her uncle both — and neither for the moment knew what to say.

Benbar the jockey was at no such loss. He saw his supremacy slipping from him, and it made him frantic with rage.

"You mean to say you'd trust a valuable hoss in a race with a young squirt like that?" he snarled. "Sure there ain't any man that ever had anything to do with race-horses would be such a fool as that!"

The others paid no heed to him.

"Will you ride for me, Lorimer?" Mr. Burtis asked half-imploringly.

"Say yes, Jack!" May cried.

"All right, I'll say yes!" Lorimer answered with a smile.

"Now that's what I call good news!" Trainer Ely exclaimed; and Donnell, still a-grin, rode forward and offered his hand, which Captain Jack gripped heartily.

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"You know why I want to win," Mr. Burtis said, slowly, as if trying to collect his thoughts. "I've always felt sure I could win with that horse, if he had a fair chance —"

"Well, you ain't a-goin' to win, if I'm out of it!" Benbar, the jockey, interrupted. "I'll ride Tyrant, now, — ride him for all I'm worth, — if I have to do it for nothin'!"

Mr. Burtis turned on him savagely.

"It won't be for nothing!" he exclaimed. "You can consider that all the money you've had from me was to purchase your treachery to my interests! That's your disposition, I think!"

"Get out of here, now," he added, "before I forget myself and do you an injury!"

With a last malignant scowl at Captain Jack, and a mutter of malice deep in his throat, the jockey slunk away.

"Hope you'll spend as much time as you can with us, Mr. Lorimer, between this and Saturday," the trainer said, anxiously. "It's an old-fashioned theory of mine that, the better the horse and rider know each other, the better race they run."

"Don't worry about that, Mr. Ely," was the smiling reply. "Probably you'll get sick of me!"

"I must leave you now, though," Captain Jack added. "Millvale High School has the call from 9 to 2, you know. Good thing such trials as this

are run at sunrise. I can pretend this takes the place of my morning exercise!"

But he did not take so cheerful a tone when, having said good-bye to the grateful horse-owner, — and to his horse, — he and May had left the park.

"It's a mean way to get back at my football, May Roxton!" he said, in a half-serious tone.

"What? How?" was the startled response.

"I'm heavy for riding. Have to take down my weight, you know, and do it in a hurry. That means Turkish baths, since I keep reasonably 'fine' all the time; and when you see me thin as a match and staggering from weakness, won't you wish you could see me, instead, fat and handsome as I am now, bucking away on the gridiron?"

"I never thought of that!" May spoke in a shocked whisper. "I'm going right back and tell Uncle George you won't ride!"

Jack laughed and caught her arm. "You'll do nothing of the sort, sweetheart," he said. "I was only joking. The flesh I sacrifice will come back — or as much of it as I need. Uncle George has been kind to me, and I'm glad to make some slight return. I'm going to ride for him — and I'm going to win!"

*rescue
here*

CHAPTER XXXII

A DEAD HEAT AND A VICTORY

A RESTLESS week was that, for January Jones! When he heard about the race that Captain Jack was to ride, he fairly went wild.

News of the race reached him on Tuesday night. Wednesday, he was at the park at sunrise, and when the trainer's "string" came out, King Tom included, the fat boy, roosting on the fence, watched with all his eyes and fell in love with every horse. And after the trial he was lifted to the seventh heaven by Captain Jack, who got him permission to follow the horses home.

Strangers are not wanted in training stables, and an honest face alone doesn't take any one very far inside. But Mr. Ely had noticed the fat boy and found him entertaining, and when Lorimer vouched for his good sense and reliability the trainer made him welcome.

So on Wednesday and Thursday January spent every spare moment, beginning at 5 o'clock in the morning, with his new friends. He grew to be so much at home that on Thursday afternoon Donnell, the foreman, sent him to the city on an important errand.

He was returning from that when he was accosted, within a few rods of the stables, by a young man who was as thin as January himself was stout — a wizened runt of a man, bow-legged, with long, ape-like arms, and something of the expression of a gorilla; not an attractive man in face or voice or manner, and yet he seemed friendly, for he tossed the fat boy a big red apple, such as he himself was eating.

“Lots of 'em in my orchard,” he said. “Like to pass 'em around. Try it. Bully, eh?”

“It's prime, Hi thank you, sir,” January answered. “Hi'd like to 'ave a horchard full of that kind.”

“Eat it up and have another. Have another,” the stranger urged. “I take a bag full, or fill my pockets, every time I go out, and I like to give 'em away. Proud of 'em, you know!”

January took another. Donnell would not be looking for him back, yet awhile, and he could eat apples till the cows came home.

“Where bound?” the stranger asked, suddenly. “Just strolling around, like myself?”

“Hi'm on me way to Mr. Hely's stables,” January replied.

“So? Work there?”

“No, sir; Hi'm just a friend of theirs, ye know.”

“Some good hosses in the stable, now?” the stranger went on.

“'Eaps of 'em!”

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"What's the best one?"

"Hi think King Tom's the best," was January's prompt reply.

"King Tom, eh? Well, if he's a favourite of yours, give him an apple for me!" And, with a croak that seemed intended for a laugh, the stranger took an apple out of a different pocket and offered it to the boy.

January laughed also — but he shook his head.

"Hi'd like to, thank ye, sir, but Hi can't," he said. "Nobody's supposed to give hanythink to the 'osses — nobody but the feeders, you know."

"Oh, well, you could slip it to him on the quiet," suggested the stranger.

January curled his lip, shook his head again, and started to walk on. But the stranger hailed him.

"Now, see here," the young man said, in a wheedling way, and with a wide, artificial grin, "I'm a man that takes notions, and when I take one I hate to be spoiled on it. I took a notion, when you spoke of that hoss you liked, that 'ere King Tom, that I'd send him an apple, see? I'll give you five dollars, cash in advance, if you'll give King Tom this apple!"

January looked at him suspiciously. Already the fat boy had heard tales of ingenious ways in which race-horses are "hocussed" and put out of the running, and this recalled them to his mind.

"Not me!" he answered. "You can take the

happle to Mr. Hely or Mr. Donnell, hif ye want. Hi won't! "

" You're a fat chump! " snarled the stranger.

" Hi think you're a bloomink crook, what? " the fat boy retorted.

" I'll show you! "

The young man dropped from the fence on which he was perched and took after January. But the race did not last very long. When they reached a turn in the road from which the training stables were visible, the stranger stopped short; and in another moment he had dived back again around the corner.

Of course the reader has already suspected that it was Benbar, the jockey, who was so generously anxious to send King Tom an apple. To that attempt there was a sequel, which Lorimer heard on Saturday morning.

" Had a call from a friend of ours, last night, " said Donnell, the foreman. " One of the dogs caught Benbar sneaking around here — looking for a chance to dose King Tom, probably. We handed him a few swift kicks and then turned him over to a policeman. Wish we had let him come inside, so we could send him to jail for breaking and entering! As it is, I suppose he won't get anything more'n a fine for trespass — but he spent the night in a cell, anyway! "

Captain Jack was sorry to hear of it. He feared that Mr. Burtis might suspect Col. Mills, Benbar's

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new employer, of being concerned in a design to drug King Tom, and that this would deepen the bitterness between the two men. But it proved that Mr. Burtis viewed the incident in a fair-minded way.

"Mills had nothing to do with it," he declared. "He's a blatherskite, but not a rascal. The plan to reach King Tom was the jockey's private enterprise. He hates us both, since I turned him off, and you'll have to look out for tricks, this afternoon!"

"I'll watch him," Lorimer answered.

Actually he felt no apprehension. King Tom, though spirited as ever, had been lamb-like with him all the week. He had run true to form at every trial, and had shown some wonderful performances, and though Col. Mills's Tyrant was undoubtedly a good horse, Jack thought he bestrode a better.

It turned out that theirs was the only race in which people felt much interest. A seven-furlong race for two-year-olds preceded it, but, though some promising youngsters came out and there was a close finish, it failed to arouse any great enthusiasm. But as the time for the mile-and-a-quarter drew near, the crowd began to thicken and everybody looked expectant.

Benbar, who had that morning paid a twenty-dollar fine for trespass on Trainer Ely's premises, scowled blackly at Lorimer as they met in the

saddling paddock, but Jack only smiled at him. The ill-will of one — and such a one! — didn't count for an evil omen; and, for a sign of luck, Mr. Burtis's colours were those of Millvale High, red and white, and, though Jack was not superstitious, he found encouragement in it.

Mr. Burtis, up in the stand with his wife and the Roxtons, nervously fingered his field-glasses, and wondered if the race was ever going to start! Yet he remembered that he had left Captain Jack calm and confident, and the lad's last words had been:

“Trust me, Mr. Burtis! I'm going to win!”

Probably few of the spectators would have credited that. King Tom's reputation of “rogue” still clung to him, and people had understood that Col. Mills's Tyrant was an exceptional horse. For that matter, there were three others running — Bonnie Boy, Claribel, and Osmond — and either of them might develop unsuspected speed.

A good many friends of his hoped to have a chance to applaud Captain Jack; but May Roxton and January Jones were about the only ones who felt sure of it.

“It's not our horse, it's Col. Mills's Tyrant, that's making trouble at the start,” May said quietly as she looked down at the field. “King Tom is behaving beautifully.”

“Ah! They're off!” Mr. Burtis uttered in a hollow voice, a moment later.

Through the field-glasses he could see that Tyrant was in front, well on the rails, and looking as if he held the race in hand. But then King Tom, who had got off well, but not in the van, came out from the ruck and made way until he was only a few lengths behind the leader.

It almost looked as if Lorimer was holding in the horse. Certainly he was going very strongly. But at the last turn in the home stretch he went wide, and lost so much ground that there seemed no chance of his making it up.

"Tyrant wins! Tyrant wins!" A thousand throats took up the cry; and Tyrant looked a winner, as he strode along unwaveringly, until they reached the last furlong.

But what was this? Forward like a flash came King Tom with Jack Lorimer, facing the front grimly, fierce with determination, seeing nothing before him but the winning-post which was soon to decide his fate.

"Tyrant wins!" "King Tom wins!" "Come along, Lorimer!" "Tyrant wins!"

Shouts that he did not hear rang in Jack's ears. He was calling on his mount, now, urging King Tom to do his best. Then one cut of his whip — the only time he had used it — and the big chestnut shot forward like an arrow.

Jack saw the black and yellow sleeves, Mills's colours, come abreast of him and fall behind; but it was after the post was passed. He pulled

up King Tom, vaguely realizing that hundreds were cheering, shouting, and calling to him by name.

"Who's won?" they cried. "Hurrah for the gentleman jockey!"

Like one in a dream, Jack saw Trainer Ely seize King's bridle and lead the horse from the course. He dropped from the saddle, almost exhausted, and found that Mr. Burtis was by his side.

"I rode a weak race! I waited too long!" Jack panted. "How was it, Mr. Burtis?"

"A dead heat," the owner answered. "Another yard, and you'd have won!"

"Hear 'em yell out there!" he added, grimly, nodding toward the spectators. "They want to know, I suppose, if we're going to let it rest this way. I'd like —"

He stopped short. Col. Mills was standing beside his jockey, warning him, blaming him, cursing him and appealing to him by turns. Benbar listened impatiently. His brute-like face had never looked more forbidding.

George Burtis strode forward to his enemy, and the two men exchanged a glance.

"Shall we run the race over?" Burtis asked, coldly.

"To be sure, to be sure!" was Col. Mills's impatient answer. "You shall not beat me, Burtis!"

And that was how it came about that, the horses

and the jockeys well rested, but the tempers of the owners probably not improved, King Tom and Tyrant met again on Monday.

It was the first race over again — with the difference of a larger turnout. For every one who had seen the first was there; and there also came a thousand more, dropping their work, whatever it might be, on the understanding that this final trial was “for blood.”

“Jack,” said Mr. Burtis, anxiously, as they met for the last time, “can you ride to win?”

“Yes, sir,” was the ready answer. “There are only two of us, now, and I’ll take no chances and show no mercy!”

“That’s right, boy!” Trainer Ely cried. “Come right away from the first minute. Make the pace a corker. Yours is the stronger horse. You’ve got him beat!”

Up in the stand the two owners watched anxiously through their glasses.

Ah! the horses were off! Col. Mills set his lips grimly, to stifle an exclamation of dismay. For it was not the black and yellow that led; it was the red and white, the Burtis colours, and King Tom was setting such a pace that Tyrant could barely hang on.

Even at the turn Jack Lorimer had the other beaten. Riding his race like a veteran he came away, and at the distance there was only one

horse in it. Where was the "rogue," the unreliable horse that people had heard about? Running like a champion, showing not the slightest sign of nervousness or temper! With a three lengths' lead, King Tom cantered past the post an easy winner.

Foaming with rage, Benbar came in, and dropped from Tyrant.

"I claim a foul, see?" he shouted. "King Tom bumped my horse!"

"You can make your objection to the committee, if you like," the clerk of the course said, coldly, "but we all saw the race, you know, and I'm afraid you won't get much sympathy."

"Nonsense, Benbar, nonsense!" another voice struck in. "Never was a fairer race run. We're squarely beaten by a better horse."

It was Col. Mills who had spoken. Mr. Burtis overheard, and came forward impulsively.

"I consider that a handsome acknowledgment, sir," Mr. Burtis said. "I thank you for it, and I should consider it an honour to shake hands with you, sir!"

Col. Mills hesitated, but only for an instant. Then he gave his hand, and the two old enemies signed a truce.

"I congratulate you on your horse, Mr. Burtis — and, yes, by jove, I congratulate you on your jockey, sir!" cried Col. Mills.

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Mr. Burtis threw his arm around Lorimer's shoulder.

"I'm rather proud of Captain Jack, myself!" he said.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TRAPPED IN A HOLE IN THE HILLS

THAT was all very well, and Lorimer valued it. But if he had expressed his honest convictions, about this time, he would have said that Charles Pratt and Will Van Dusen were, above almost any others he knew, the fellows of whom friends had a right to be proud; because they had turned from careless, weak and self-indulgent ways and had pluckily clung to the better habits that make an athlete — and a man!

Pratt, the Roxbridge boy, dated his reformation from the camping trip. At first he had not been quite sure that he wanted to drop cigarettes and other forms of foolishness; but Horace White had given him just the "jolt" he needed, and association with clean-minded, sound-bodied fellows had roused his ambition. Then when he went home the Roxbridge athletes offered a friendly welcome, and Lorimer and the Millvale boys stood by him, and now, in his last year at Roxbridge High, he had become a credit to the school and was reckoned among its leaders.

His uncle, Principal Horton, had grown to

trust him, as well as the boys did, — to rely on him, instead of treating him with savage contempt. Pratt had proof of that, one Friday morning, soon after the term began, when the principal quietly summoned him from a classroom. Mr. Horton had an open letter in his hand and he glanced at it, with a worried expression, as he led the way toward his pet and pride, the cabinet of geological specimens.

“Charles,” he began, abruptly, “can I induce you to take a holiday and go to Marshall for me?”

“Why, yes, sir, of course.” The senior was smiling at the thought of being “induced” to take a holiday.

“I have information that Prof. Berger designs to visit us on Monday,” went on the principal. “It will hardly be possible to keep him away from this cabinet, and of course he will expect to find the geology of the region well illustrated. Now, we haven’t a specimen of the Marshall conglomerates! That which I found here was so imperfect that I removed it, designing to replace it with a better — but I haven’t procured the new specimen, and I can’t obtain it myself because, as you know, I have an imperative engagement out of town.

“I find that Friday is quite an easy day with you, easier, perhaps, than it is with any other senior who would have the enterprise and sense to get what I want. I fear that a member of a

lower class would hardly understand our needs. If you feel like starting off at short notice and taking the 10 o'clock train, I will inform your mother and — ”

“ Yes, sir, of course I'll go,” Pratt broke in. “ And why shouldn't I stop off at Millvale, as I come back, and stay overnight with one of the fellows? ”

“ I see no objection,” Mr. Horton answered. “ I shall have started for Boston before you possibly could return to Roxbridge, so there is nothing to be gained, perhaps, by hastening home. I'll tell your mother, then, that you'll be back — ”

“ Any time to-morrow! ” Pratt put in laughingly, as he took the money his uncle handed him, and hurried toward the dressing-room.

“ Be careful, Charles! ” were Mr. Horton's last words.

Pratt smiled and waved his hand. There are dangerous places in the Marshall Hills; but, if he had thought at all of the dangers of his quest, he would have put down the chief, if not the only one, as the risk of a fall down some unstable ledge of rotten rock.

Naturally, he did not think. Foolhardiness was no weakness of his, and he was the last fellow to run needless risks, but he had complete confidence, now, in his strength and sure-footedness. And when he left the railroad station at Marshall and started on his three-mile walk to the hills,

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it was with the firm assurance that at 5 o'clock, at that same place, he would be taking the train for home — via Millvale.

He was in light marching order, with a canvas bag for his specimens, a geologist's hammer, a package of lunch and a bottle of water, and he made nothing of the walk before him. Yet the hills were by no means the end of it, for the point Mr. Horton had indicated, as likely to yield the best conglomerates, was still high, if not far.

Once or twice, on the way, Pratt tested a promising ledge and broke out lumps and crystals which would be worth keeping unless something better turned up. He dropped them into his bag, intending later to go over all he had gathered and choose the best.

"Chance to exercise my judgment!" he muttered, with a laugh. "Not even a crow, here, to help me pick 'em over!"

It was true his surroundings were lonely — one might have said, desolate. There was nothing about the hills to appeal to lovers of beauty, no "bits" for photographers, no cosy spots that suggested picnics; nor was there any promise of usefulness about the place. A sheep would have had hard work to find pasturage there.

A cold east wind whistled across the great, bare slopes, but this did not trouble the explorer. Onward and still upward he went, until he reached

a turret-shaped peak that Mr. Horton had described to him.

Here was a ridge that ran due north and south, and following it in the former direction for two or three hundred paces, Charles turned to the left. A casual stroke of the hammer showed him that here and hereabouts, and probably within ten minutes, he could easily fill his bag; and, flinging himself down on the softest spot, though all were hard enough, he ate his lunch, and then, as he lay still to rest, let his eyes roam over the dismal landscape.

On the farther side, down which he was gazing, the ridge fell away into a surface somewhat different from that up which he had climbed. The slope ran steeply down for perhaps an eighth of a mile. Beyond was a bog.

It was a dreary scene — the bare hillside, and the swamp of black mud, dotted with thickets of coarse reeds, and stagnant pools covered with yellow scum. Not a human habitation was in sight in that direction. Nothing moved but a few cows away off on the skyline.

Slowly his spirits sank as he gazed. Physically he was comfortable enough, for the sun was hot, and where he lay he was sheltered from the wind. But the solitude and silence were taking hold of his imagination, and before he quite realized it he found himself recalling unpleasant things and foreboding evil.

Well, he knew the cure for that frame of mind. Laughing at himself for a fool, he jumped up and went to work — breaking up ten times as much rock as he needed, just for the sake of stretching his muscles.

Across the ridge and forward and back he went, whistling cheerily as the exertion braced him. Nor did he sit down to pick over his specimens, but went from one little heap to another, choosing everything that had form or colour or composition to recommend it, and giving himself a generous load.

That done, the notion came to him that he would go down that farther slope and skirt the base of the hill. He had plenty of time, the exercise would do him good, and it was possible he would stumble on something choicer than he had yet found.

But he had not gone very far down-hill when he suddenly stopped, thankful that his eyes had chanced to seek the ground. Flinging himself on his hands and knees, he gazed into a narrow crevice in the rock, not more than a foot wide at the top and perhaps five feet long.

The cavity into which he had so nearly stepped seemed to be much larger below than above. Six feet or so from the mouth, where there was a little shelf of stone, the curious hole in the ground was as wide as a man's arms could span.

But that was not what kept Pratt looking. It

was a crystal that held his gaze and fixed his determination. A ray of sunlight striking down the narrow shaft rested fairly upon it and made it gleam with rainbow colours.

It was out of reach, no matter how much he strained. But it looked easy to lower himself to that shelf of rock, six feet below, break off his specimen, and, seizing the edges of the crevice, draw himself out again.

Throwing his bag from his shoulder, he studied the situation from all sides. He wanted the crystal, which, so far as he could see, was quite different from anything his search had yielded. And why should he not have the crystal? To drop to that little ledge directly underneath would be as simple as taking a step in the street, and to pull himself up by the sides of the cavity was no task at all, for the athlete he believed himself to be.

"Chances are that it won't seem attractive, after I get it," he said to himself. "Here goes to get it, though, anyway!"

Turning on his face, he lowered himself. There was no need to use much caution, for the place he meant to stand on was straight below, and he couldn't miss it.

It proved, however, that his estimate of the depth of the shaft had been mistaken. He had thought it less than six feet down, if anything, but now, as he swung, he found it was still be-

neath him; and, finally, he released his hold and dropped.

Crash! Lightly though he landed on that deceptive outcropping of rock, he broke it away. In a vain effort to save himself, he leaped upward and threw out his hands. But the collapse of the ledge had taken him by surprise. He could not choose his grip as he had planned. His hands slipped off from the bare and rounded edges of the cavity, and he fell into the unseen depth below.

When Pratt came to himself, he was lying on his back in mud and water. He was almost in darkness, and for a minute he could not imagine what had happened. All he knew was that he was wet, cold, and in pain.

Standing up to his ankles in the freezing slush, he beat his arms across his body until he got back a little circulation. Then, cautiously, and moving with some difficulty — for he had lamed an ankle and had a bad bump on one side of his head — he began to investigate his surroundings.

Up above, a long way up, apparently, he saw the crack that admitted daylight. He struggled up a few inches nearer, but by that time the light gave him little comfort.

He was at the bottom of a cave or hole, shaped, in a rough way, like a great bowl or bottle. The mouth was twelve or fifteen feet above his head. The sides were rough stone, and the way they



“ FORWARD LIKE A FLASH CAME KING TOM.”

sloped inward would make it a hard matter to climb out. It had to be done, though, and, choosing what seemed to be the best place, at the narrower end, Pratt set at work.

An hour later, lamer than he had been at first, with hands bleeding and clothing in tatters, he sank, benumbed and helpless, on a heap of rotten rock which his useless efforts had shaken down. He had discovered by practical proof that escape was out of the question. He was hopelessly imprisoned in one of the remotest parts of the hills.

CHAPTER XXXIV

PRATT GETS WHAT HE WENT AFTER

It was a pretty dismal prospect. Already Pratt began to wish he had kept those scraps of luncheon he had thrown away, up above. He might need them, in the course of the next week!

For, as he summed up the situation, even admitting that fortune favoured, — admitting that he got out at all, — days might elapse before he was found. It was hardly likely that anxiety would be aroused, and a search for him begun, before some time the next day, Saturday; and then, no matter how many friends turned out to hunt, the chances were against an early discovery; for the Marshall Hills spread over miles of territory, and he was at the bottom of a pretty small hole.

Principal Horton could narrow the field of search by pointing out the locality to which he had directed his nephew. But Mr. Horton had planned to go out of town, and the chances were that he would hear nothing about it and would be out of reach until Monday.

Then, again, this hole into which he, Charles,

had fallen was on the "wrong side" of the hill, and fully an eighth of a mile from the spot where he had been expected to do most of his work. Assuming that the boys got information on Monday morning, how many days would it take them to widen their circle of investigation as far as that hole?

"Wish that dog of Jack Lorimer's was a bloodhound, instead of a bull terrier!" Pratt muttered. "They'll need one!"

The one certainty that faced him was that he must keep up his strength and spirits. When anybody came that way — if anybody did come — he must hear them and he must be able to make them hear him.

It was damp and cold, as well as dark, down there at the bottom of the hole. Perched on his heap of rocks, just above the mud and water, Pratt took off his shoe and gave his lame ankle a vigorous rubbing. Then, solely for occupation, he again attacked that narrow end where he had made the fruitless effort to escape. He estimated that if he kept at work there every day, and ten hours a day, with his one tool, his hammer, he could dig himself out to the surface in just about five months!

But as darkness came on he had another unpleasant reminder that escape would have to be contrived by somebody pretty quickly — provided wet weather chanced to set in.

It began to rain. The water poured in little rills down the side of the cave, and Charles had to shift his position and crawl as far as he could under an overhanging rock. Drearily the wind howled overhead, the water dripped more thickly, and presently he became aware that the puddle which covered the bottom of the cave was changing to a pool.

Had it not been for those efforts of his which had seemed so fruitless and foolish, he would have been worse off than he was. By shifting and piling the loose rocks he had broken down, he managed to stay above the flood, though to keep dry was out of his power.

Crouching in a state between sleeping and waking, he somehow worried through the long night — a nightmare, rather, of cold and wet, pain and hunger.

When at last morning dawned, there was a foot of water in the hole. And to-day there was no sun to cheer him with an occasional slanting ray. Though the rain had stopped, the sky was covered with driving clouds, which dipped, at times, filling the air with fog.

But the light, such as it was, was welcome. He could move, now, without risking a ducking. The cessation of rain was another thing to be thankful for, for there seemed a prospect that, sooner or later, the pool on the floor would drain away.

An athlete can get warm without a fire, provided

he has room to swing an arm, and exercises that had served him before were called on now, with equally good results. Then Pratt went at the narrow end of his cave again, and the hopeless effort, laughable to think of, of pecking a path to the upper earth.

Probably he worked for two or three hours. At any rate, he kept it up until he realized he was faint; and about the same time there flashed across his mind a thought that caused him to drop the hammer as if it burned him.

That was, that the way to economize his strength was by keeping still. The more muscular exertion, the more hunger and thirst, and — since these could not be satisfied — the more suffering, the greater weakness, and the speedier collapse. He had learned, hours earlier, that he could not make his escape unaided. What a fool he would be to continue efforts that might leave him in such shape that he would miss the help of others!

He rearranged the stones he had broken down, so that he could sit on them or recline on them, after a fashion, and placed himself where he could look up at the narrow mouth of the cave. Once in awhile, four times in the hour, perhaps, he would fill his lungs and send out a long "Hello! Help!" But the cry, though repeated in a deafening way by the reverberations of the cave, probably was scarcely audible at the surface.

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Between these calls, which, he suspected, were strength-wasting, and should be stopped, his mind was busy, not so much with his own situation, which worrying would not improve, as with affairs at home, in Millvale, and elsewhere. Would the Millvale fellows be wondering where he was? for, as the train passed through, he had called a hello and a promise to return, to Horace White and Will Amos, who chanced to be at the depot. Probably, though, when he failed to reappear, they would take it that he had changed his mind and gone straight home, and they would think no more about it.

There was a moment, about 10 o'clock, when he fancied that, faint and far away, he heard voices, and he yelled more than once in answer. But nothing came of it, and after awhile he decided that it was only birds or beasts that he heard, and he would better save his breath.

Then he went back in thought to the camp at Four Corners, and recalled the good time he had, and the changes, all for the better, that had come about since then. He thought of Will Van Dusen. He wondered what Captain Jack was doing to-day. And then, when it had grown to seem that the afternoon was full six weeks long — though as a matter of fact, it was only about 11 o'clock — he went to sleep.

He woke with a start that almost upset the unsteady seat of stones on which he had perched

himself. He had dreamed that Ben Butler, Jack Lorimer's bull terrier, was chasing Will Van Dusen through Millvale, and barking furiously as he ran.

But no, that was no dream, or not all a dream. He did hear a dog's bark, and he stood up, to bring his head nearer the surface, and put all the power of his lungs into a reply:

"Here, Ben!" he cried. "Here, Ben! Seek, Ben, good dog!"

Nearer came the sound. Now he heard human voices; and now, as he looked up at the little patch of daylight, it was partially obscured, all at once, and he saw the dog's head, the eyes gleaming with eagerness, — for the bull terrier was as fond of Pratt as of almost anybody but Captain Jack himself.

"Good dog, Ben!" he called. "Fetch 'em, boy!"

Probably the bull terrier knew it was all right now. A few short barks were all he would waste on those who were behind him. He wanted to get to his friend, and he whined and scratched and tore around like a mad thing to find a way.

He found it, too, though not exactly that which he sought. One of those bare and slippery surfaces it was, and his eagerness tempted him too far and made him lose his hold. Thirty pounds of bone and muscle, he came hurtling down against Pratt's chest, knocking the boy head over heels.

"Hello, Charles! You down there?" It was Lorimer's voice.

Pratt sat up, rubbing the back of his head with one hand and patting the dog with the other.

"I'm here," he answered.

"Any bones broken?"

"Not unless Ben Butler smashed a few of my ribs just now! Got a rope?"

"Sure!" Lorimer yelled and waved his hand, and almost at once a dozen fellows seemed to join him. Next moment a rope came down.

"Give me plenty of slack," Pratt called. "I'm going to rig a sling in the middle of the rope for Ben, and keep my end to guy him clear of the rocks. Careful with him, please! Pull up!"

Slowly the bull terrier rose to the surface, and the rope was released from him and sent down again.

"Come over the other side, will you, boys?" Pratt called, as he grasped it. "Yes, that's right. How many of you are there? Enough so you can hold me for a minute, half-way up?"

"Easily," Lorimer answered.

"Sure we can stand it as long as you can!" Terry McGrady chuckled. "'Tis a last fond look he's planning for, boys, so he'll not forget it!"

It was not exactly that. But Pratt laughed and took his time. And it was fully twenty minutes later, when the hand-shaking was over and the crowd was well started on the retreat

from the desolate cliff, that Lorimer thought to ask:

"See here, Charlie, what were you doing when we were holding you in mid-air? Carving your name in the rock?"

Pratt smiled and drew from his pocket a beautiful specimen of conglomerate.

"I was digging this out," he said. "It was trying for this that got me into the cave, and I didn't see how I could go off and leave it."

With the same thought in their minds, Jack and Terry, who were walking beside him, slapped him on the back in hearty admiration. Pratt had proved himself! In a time of peril he had kept his nerve. Not only that, but in the glad excitement of the rescue, when ninety out of a hundred would have lost their heads, he had steadfastly clung to his purpose. That showing of character warranted and repaid all that the Millvale boys had done for him. Henceforth he would be "one of the crowd!"

CHAPTER XXXV

THE PROVING OF WILL VAN DUSEN

THAT Pratt should be so soon discovered and released seemed almost marvellous; yet the mystery was easily explained. Instead of leaving town, as he had intended, Principal Horton had been kept at home by illness. On Saturday morning he had telephoned the Millvale gym, to ask his nephew to do an errand. Thus the Millvale boys learned where Charles had gone, and that he had not returned, and within an hour a score of them — and Ben Butler, the dog — set out for the Marshall Hills.

So now Pratt had served his apprenticeship, as it were, and had been admitted to full fellowship with the athletes. As for the other apprentice, young Will Van Dusen, the time that should try his nerve and courage was close at hand.

Two or three weeks earlier, Mr. Van Dusen had received an anonymous letter threatening that, unless he left a large sum of money in a certain place, at a certain time, Will would be "made away with." Threats of such a kind are not unfamiliar to wealthy men. Mr. Van Dusen had

had them before. But this time, instead of informing the police as usual, he left the case in Lorimer's hands.

It seemed at first thought a crazy action. But Mrs. Van Dusen was in feeble health; and, if the police were called in, there would be a newspaper sensation, or a series of them, and the life of the wife and mother would be endangered by shock and strain. He did not wish that she should even hear of the threats. He felt sure he could trust the athletes to guard his boy. So for a time Lou Mains became one of the family, ostensibly that Will might have the benefit of some special coaching; the boy was never left alone; and at night the fellows took turns to keep an eye on the grounds, while the patrolmen on that beat, Carl Halvorsen and Barney Oldfield — faithful friends of Captain Jack — were always on the alert.

There was only one member of the household of whom Lorimer and Mains felt suspicious. That was a young man named Pond, who combined the duties of tutor to Will and secretary to Mr. Van Dusen. To "match him," so to speak, a brother of Halvorsen, the Swedish officer, was engaged as a sort of outside man, who was free to go anywhere about the place. So the day came — and almost passed — on which the threat against Will was booked to take effect; and when Lorimer started for Van Dusen's, in the early

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evening, it seemed that their precautions had been successful, and nothing had happened.

But, with a sense of trouble impending, he saw that fire engines were just driving away from the house. He hurried up the walk. Lou Mains, looking as much upset as it was possible for him to look, met him at the door and drew him one side.

"Bilked!" Lou muttered. "They've played it on us. Will's gone!"

"How's that?"

"Just going out to dinner," Lou explained. "Flash of flame in the hall, big cloud of smoke blew in, and somebody yelled 'Fire!' Ran upstairs and telephoned an alarm. Then went downstairs — hadn't been away more than two minutes — but the boy was missing, and so was Pond. Must have gone by the back way. Easy. Everybody in the house chased out to the front hall — where the fake fire was."

"Fake fire?" Lorimer repeated.

"That's what," nodded Mains. "Nothing burned but some kind of chemical mess that went out in a minute or two. No damage."

"Where's Van Dusen?"

"Wired that he'd be detained. Won't be home before 8 o'clock. Boy's mother doesn't suspect anything. She hasn't been told about the scheme against Will, you know. Jollied her along. Told her Will and Pond had started to get

more engines." Mains ended with a rueful smile. "Kick me!" he said.

"Nonsense, man!" Captain Jack replied. "It was a clever scheme they worked, and probably it would have fooled anybody, just as it did you. All there is for us to do now is to find 'em. You run around those two sides of the house and put our fellows on the track, and I'll take these two sides."

The stir of excitement in the house was not yet over, and nobody noticed Lorimer as, aided by the darkness, he slipped along toward the rear and then struck across the wide lawn bounded on that side by Mercator Street. Near the hedge he knew there was a narrow strip of ungrassed ground, and, by following that, he believed he might find footprints that would indicate the road Pond had taken.

But the clew came sooner and in an unexpected way, for, before he had reached the nearer side of the hedge, Lorimer almost fell over a prostrate figure that moaned and struggled feebly.

"Who are you?" Captain Jack demanded.

"On de yob," was the gasping reply. "Carl Halvorsen's brudder."

"What is the matter with you?"

"Ay stop de man," Halvorsen answered. "He hit me mit something. You go quick — Acorn Street — half-way — empty house, big tree in front. Ay found him yust dis afternoon."

"But what am I going to do with you?"

"Nefer you mind me. Lay here awhile — Ay be all right. You go quick!"

"We won't forget you, Halvorsen!" And with that Captain Jack dashed away.

He knew Acorn Street. He had noticed that tumbledown empty house with the tree in front. It was not ten minutes' walk from the place where he stood. Lorimer ran. The distance was soon covered, and he paused a minute to look over the ground.

A desolate and forbidding place it was. It might have been unoccupied and slowly falling to pieces for a thousand years, from all appearances. Yet there was a light in one of the upper windows, and as Jack surveyed it he saw a figure pass before the pane.

A gigantic elm grew quite close to the house on that side. Climbing it easily enough, Lorimer crept out on a big limb until he was within a yard of the window. The window was open a few inches, and he took pains to go slowly and carefully, that he might not be heard. He had no fear of being seen, for the night was black as ink.

He himself could both see and hear. And his first glance showed him three persons — Pond, an older and larger man with a heavy and brutal face, and Will Van Dusen, tightly bound to a chair.

Pond was speaking, as Captain Jack approached



"HIS FIRST GLANCE SHOWED HIM THREE PERSONS."

the window. There was a satanic smile on his face and his words fell with callous brutality.

"You see, my young friend," he said, "we have our way, in spite of the watchful cleverness of your hundred guardians. Unfortunately for you and your parents, we are smarter than the Millvale Athletic Club!

"Nothing remains, now," the secretary went on, "but to interest you and please ourselves by telling you what we propose to do with you — and then doing it. I shall have to begin by going into ancient history a little. My friend and I are not fond of your father. He put my friend in jail. He broke up a profitable business with which I was associated, and — "

"What was your business? Forgery or counterfeiting?" the boy asked, calmly.

Pond snarled an oath at him.

"We could have made use of some of your father's money, though, even if he had paid what we asked, we should have struck at him again," the secretary added. "Since he undertook to save it, at our expense, we shall have the keener satisfaction of squaring accounts at one blow. We propose — "

"Say, why not give the kid one more chance?" the other villain broke in.

Pond pretended to think it over.

"Very well," he said at length. "I'm willing to be merciful — provided I'm paid for it. We

have you. No one can rescue you. We can reach your father, however, with perfect safety to ourselves, and if you value your life enough to write a note requesting him to pay the ransom to our messenger, we'll release you."

Pale but firm, Will faced them.

"I'll not ask father to have any dealings with scoundrels like you!" he answered.

Pond stood still and cast an evil grin at him.

"Brave lad! Brave lad!" the secretary cried. "I wonder if you'll be so dauntless when you're tied in the middle of Mercator Street and hear your father's auto rushing down on you at forty miles an hour!"

Involuntarily Will gasped.

"That's the idea, precisely," Pond went on. "We detained your father in town by a telegram which we took the liberty to sign by the name of your friend Jack Lorimer. We have already summoned him back, telling him to approach the house by way of Mercator Street and at his best speed, for reasons to be explained to him later."

"Mercator Street has always been a quiet, unfrequented thoroughfare," Pond added, smilingly. "We made it less popular still by displaying a ghost there on several occasions. We shall have notice of the time your father leaves the train and enters his auto, and at that time we shall proceed to tie you in the middle of the street — at the darkest point, just beyond the

curve. The occupants of the car will not see you until it is too late to stop.

"It will be some considerable time before you'll stop," Pond chuckled. "I wouldn't be surprised if the auto flung you over the roof of your own house — a dramatic and picturesque arrival which would impress all your family and friends!"

Will Van Dusen still kept his nerve and courage.

"I'm not afraid of you!" he retorted. "You don't dare to do any such horrible thing as you say! You know my father would have you both hanged to pay for it!"

"He'd have to catch us first, my son! And as for daring" — Pond glanced at his watch — "Time's up! We'll begin it now!"

As he spoke the secretary took a step forward. Was he going to torture the helpless lad before him?

In his excitement Jack Lorimer lost his balance. For a horrible second he felt himself falling — and the ground was thirty feet below. Then with one supreme effort he sprang forward and crashed through the window into the room.

He heard Will Van Dusen shout his name. Either Pond or his companion uttered a terrible oath. Then darkness swept over Lorimer's senses.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN THE TRACK OF VAN DUSEN'S CAR

LORIMER was alone, bound, and in the dark. That was the first thing he realized — that and the pain in his head — as he struggled back to consciousness.

Evidently the ruffians thought they had killed him with a blow. Either that, or they had believed he did not know their plan and could not recover in time to pursue them; for, though they had tied him to a table, the bonds were not hard to loosen, and in a very few moments he was free.

Staggering toward the door, he found it locked, and it did not yield to his fiercest assault. But there was the tree by which he had entered. Ill as he felt, he must risk that leap. Climbing to the sill, he launched himself into the gulf.

He caught the bough, reached the trunk, and after a dozen hazards finally found himself in the street. He hardly knew yet what had happened. A confused idea that somebody was in danger and he must help — that was all he knew.

But suddenly consciousness and memory came back with a flash, and he set off along the street

at the greatest pace to which he could force his trembling limbs.

"It's Will!" he gasped. "Mercator Street! I must get there quick!"

He spoke truly. The boy was sorely in need of help.

After Lorimer had been silenced, Pond and his villainous companion made one more attempt to induce Will to beg for mercy and ransom. But he had no doubt the two would kill him or carry him away, whatever they agreed to do, and he would not even give them the satisfaction of an answer.

Enraged at his contempt, at length, they gagged him, tied his wrists behind his back, and hurried him away to Mercator Street. Passing a stout rope twice around his body, they secured the ends to fence-posts on either side of the road. It was as if he had been lashed to a pillar in the middle of the narrow street. He was helpless, and at the mercy of any vehicle. The cleverest driver could hardly have avoided him.

But this was not a street that vehicles traversed, especially after dark. Probably none would come, except that one which had been summoned. The bitterest thought, the one that added the final touch to his sense of dread and horror, was that his father's own auto would deal the death blow.

If he had only been able to call for help, he thought! Yet, had he stopped to think, he would

have realized that would do him no good, for there was no one to hear.

Straining his eyes through the darkness, he awaited the end with what courage he could command. More than once he was certain he heard the note of an auto horn or the pulsation of the engine. Each time he would strain and struggle to free himself, and after each desperate attempt he felt with deeper certainty that the effort was useless. The villains who secured him had done their work well.

Then suddenly, at last, he heard the deep roar of an auto that was travelling at high speed. This time he knew he could not be mistaken.

The sound grew louder. Away off in the distance, around the curve, he could see three points of light. They were the reflections of the lamps of Mr. Van Dusen's car. Bewildered and terrified by the conflicting telegrams that seemed to come from Captain Jack, the owner had ordered his chauffeur to drive at express-train speed.

One last fruitless effort to break free, and then, with a groan, the boy resigned himself to his fate.

But at that awful moment, while his starting eyes were fixed on those oncoming lights, Captain Jack was bounding toward him. Lorimer's brain had cleared in an instant as he saw that figure in the roadway. Gripping his pocket-knife, held open in his hand, he nerved himself for a great effort.

Never afterward, however, could any of the sharers in that thrilling scene form a clear idea of what did really happen. Lorimer must have reached the boy at the very instant when the glare from the lamps fell full upon his face. One, two mad slashes at the rope — then it parted, and Will Van Dusen and his rescuer threw themselves backward out of the way as the monster rolled by in irrepressible power.

But the boys had been seen. The car was brought up in masterly style, and it was Mr. Van Dusen himself who helped them, unhurt, out of the gutter into which they had stumbled.

A few words told the story. They had to suffice, for Captain Jack and Will Van Dusen, still dazed from the strain of their terrible adventure, were in no condition to talk.

The millionaire's lips set grimly, as he listened, in a thin, straight line.

"Drive to police headquarters," he told the chauffeur. Arrived there, his interview with the chief was very short and businesslike.

"I authorize you to offer a reward of five thousand dollars for the capture of those villains," he said. "Remember, I want both! They were anxious that I should spend the five thousand, and I give you my word I'm more than willing."

To end this part of the story briefly, it may be said that Mr. Van Dusen had the chance. The big reward aroused all the police of the East, as

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well as a good many amateur detectives, and within forty-eight hours Pond and his partner had been laid by the heels.

But this desirable result was still in the future, as the father, his son, and Captain Jack rode back to the Van Dusen place; and in the present there were other thoughts at the front of the millionaire's mind.

"How did the boy behave?" he asked, all at once, of Lorimer, and nodding at Will.

"Splendidly!" was Captain Jack's enthusiastic answer. "I could see and hear him, and to my certain knowledge he didn't falter or tremble or give way an inch. I was proud of him, and so would you have been, sir!"

"I couldn't have acted like that, once," Will said, thoughtfully, before his father could speak. "I might have been just as brave, inside, you know, but I'd have been shaky outside. You remember, father, I used to jump when a door slammed — but now I'm not the least bit jumpy!"

"Your nerves are steadier, and under control," Captain Jack commented, with a smile. The millionaire nodded.

"He's a different boy, thanks to you," Mr. Van Dusen said. "I don't mind telling you, Lorimer, that I felt at the start, and for quite awhile, that this physical training of yours was in the nature of an experiment. We could go on through the summer, I thought, — while you and the

boy here were having holidays, — and at the worst we could say that the training was just part of the summer play. But I've been changing my mind about it, as the boy himself has changed for the better. It's more than fun, — it's sound commonsense, this work of yours! I want Will to keep it up. I rely on you to continue guiding him."

He was silent a moment, as the auto stopped at the head of the drive. Then he turned to his companions with a laugh.

"We'll put it, then, that the holidays — the experiments — are over, and you and the boy will settle down to business," he said. "Keep on as you've been going, Lorimer, only take it for granted that you're not to stop until you've made Will just such another as yourself!"

Captain Jack smiled also, though he shook his head.

"That's not a very high ideal, I'm afraid, sir," he replied. "More like a holiday task, after all. I'm only —"

"The kind of lad that every American father wishes his son to be!" Mr. Van Dusen interrupted. "Don't contradict me, Lorimer! I know!"

THE END.

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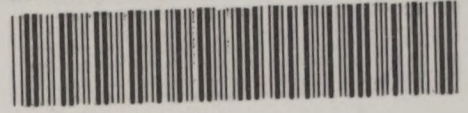
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